ForeWord Reviews

Silent Heroes: Courageous Families Living with Depression & Mental Illness
Maureen Focht
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Living with a person who has a mental disease is one of life's greatest challenges, and some people handle it better than others. That is one of the points of this interesting and well-written book. In the first section, which is part memoir and part reference book, the author chronicles the years of her mother's schizophrenia, interspersed with brief interludes of factual information about mental illness. The "silent hero" during that part of Focht's life was her father, who cared for his wife with love and respect. The book then moves on to tell stories of other people who struggle to cope with the effects of a family member's illness.

Although it was written for people in situations that are similar to the author's, this book will prove interesting and useful for anyone who would like to learn more about mental disease. Psychiatric illnesses are still so often misunderstood that Focht recommends that people educate themselves as a first step in coping. "People don't snap out of mental-health disorders," she explains, "because they don't snap into them."

Focht acknowledges that much of her understanding came later in life when she went through a period of therapy. Terrified during a turbulent time in her life that she was succumbing to the same illness as her mother, Focht sought counseling, and discovered that this fear is shared by most people who have a family member who is mentally ill. She also came to the realization that there are thousands of "silent heroes" who may be struggling to cope and have no idea that they don't have to struggle alone.

This realization prompted the author to begin working with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill as an educator in the Family-to-Family Program. With a bachelor's degree in business from Northern Illinois and a master's in educational counseling from National University in Sacramento, California, Focht is also a training specialist for the nationally known "Parent Project."

While nicely done for the most part, the book is a bit too simplistic for some readers, and suffers some from repetition, especially hammering home the fact that mental illness is a disease like any other disease. It does, however, offer sound advice and coping strategies that readers who are living with a mentally ill loved one will find quite helpful.

Maryann Miller