



Unraveled: A Story of Heartache and Hope

Ann Taylor Lavery

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Writing with honesty and authenticity, Lavery captures the pain of a mother struggling with an addict son.

Unraveled is the heart-wrenching story of one mother's struggle with her son's heroin addiction. Ann Taylor Lavery and her husband, Mike, were already the primary caretakers of two children with special needs when they discovered that their third child, Matt, was an addict. The ins and outs of caring for special-needs children add a fascinating twist to an otherwise straightforward tale.

Unraveled is an honest and authentic portrayal of one family's dystopian world. Lavery is a good writer, and families with substance-abusing children will find solace in this meticulously chronicled account of her three-plus years of extraordinary struggles.

The day-to-day life of Matt's need for a fix and the money to buy it, coupled with Lavery and her husband's often counterproductive yearning to be supportive parents, forms the central plot. Matt is a skilled and prolific liar who, when he can't talk his parents into giving him money, steals from them. Lavery and her husband are consummate enablers, as equally afraid to say no as they are to say yes. When Matt relapses, which happens with painful regularity, they send him to treatment and attempt to micromanage it, and few details of this quagmire-like dance are spared by Lavery's pen. Her guileless ability to openly share her numerous mistakes seems almost epic and is a healthy testament to her integrity.

There is an abundance of books about addiction from every viewpoint imaginable, and to Lavery's credit, she does an excellent and well-rounded job of highlighting the singular hell that an addict's mother endures. Lavery asserts, almost desperately, that she raised her son well, and she spills the normal minutiae of Matt's childhood in an awkwardly self-conscious defense of her parenting. Guilt, irrational hope, and second-guessing pepper nearly every page.

Lavery's memoir is also a condemnation of the substance-abuse treatment facilities that repeatedly fail Matt, the friends he made in rehab, and their families. Relapse and overdose are all too common, yet without viable alternatives, addicts and their loved ones have no choice but to stay in a system that is broken. Lavery writes, too, about the significant role insurance played in her drama. Though blessed with coverage that paid most of Matt's twenty-eight-day treatment, getting quality care—and long-term care that may have proved more successful—was next to impossible.

Unraveled is a book that would be twice as good if it were half as long. The repetitions and redundancies are somewhat justified by the realities of addiction, treatment, and relapse ad infinitum. Families of addicts will likely forgive the excesses, though, because they will understand why it's done: addiction is messy and uncomfortable, and it just goes on and on, day after month after year. In *Unraveled*, Lavery has nailed it.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (December 12, 2013)

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