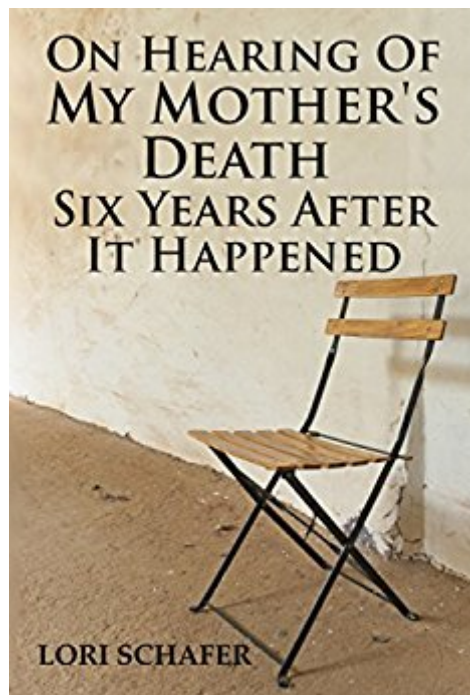




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# **On Hearing Of My Mother's Death Six Years After It Happened: A Daughter's Memoir Of Mental Illness**



## Synopsis

It was the spring of 1989. I was sixteen years old, a junior in high school and an honors student. I had what every teenager wants: a stable family, a nice home in the suburbs, a great group of friends, big plans for my future, and no reason to believe that any of that would ever change. Then came my mother's psychosis. I experienced first-hand the terror of watching someone I loved transform into a monster, the terror of discovering that I was to be her primary victim. For years I've lived with the sadness of knowing that she, too, was a helpless victim of a terrible disease that consumed and destroyed the strong and caring woman I had once called Mom. My mother's illness took everything. My family, my home, my friends, my future. A year and a half later I would be living alone on the street on the other side of the country, wondering whether I could even survive on my own. But I did. That was how my mother - my real mother - raised me. To survive. She, too, was a survivor. It wasn't until last year that I learned that she had died - in 2007. No one will ever know her side of the story now. But perhaps, at last, it's time for me to tell mine.

## Book Information

File Size: 636 KB

Print Length: 192 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 194217022X

Simultaneous Device Usage: Unlimited

Publication Date: November 7, 2014

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00N0WYHDQ

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #6,402 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #6 in Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Dysfunctional Families #8 in Kindle Store > Prime Reading > Nonfiction > Parenting & Relationships #28 in Kindle Store > Prime

## Customer Reviews

Sad but so true with mental illness in families. Glad that she survived and used her book to tell the story to bring herself what peace she could find and maybe help someone else struggling with a family member's illness. Sadly in even our family some of us as we got older have distanced ourselves from our mother for our own survival. You can only do so much and in the end you have to make tough choices. I wish her serenity and peace now.

Amazing how a child/teenager can be do resilient. Interesting observations of being on the inside looking out and being on the outside looking in.

A story about a young girl who grows into a woman who lives (I should say survives) with a schizophrenic mother. I am so pleased that she tells her life's story so others that are in the same situation can be aware of what it might be like and not have to wonder what the \_\_\_\_\_ they did to deserve such a life. The chapter I enjoyed the most was ON WRITING MY MEMOIR. Praise to you, Lori Schafer.

I gave this book a five star rating. It taught me a lot about mental illness and how it effects the whole family. It was very interesting and informative. Well written and recommend this book to everyone.

I'm trembling inside because I want to do justice to this wonderful book in my review. I am tempted to wimp out and say no more than "this book is great!" But wimping out is not who I am. Well... not usually. :) Taking a deep breath now while I remind myself of my motto: Fear No Truth. (You cannot effectively deal with reality if you fearfully refuse to face it.) The truth is that I relate to this amazing book on a number of levels. First, as a daughter struggling to grow up and find her way in life despite having, in my case, two severely disordered parents. Lori Schafer's mother, as described in this riveting memoir, is basically a composite of both my parents. As the daughter of two badly broken people who had no business being parents in the first place, many passages in Lori's book leaped off the page and hit me right in my heart. Here is one example: When Mom first lost her marbles, I spent a lot of time trying to explain the things she said and did to other people. Oftentimes they wouldn't believe me. "But why would she do that?" they'd reply. "It makes no sense!" No, it

made no sense. ....it's a mistake to try to evaluate the behavior of the severely mentally ill by the standards of rational people.~Yes. Exactly right. That's why they call it

“crazy.” I’m taking another deep breath now. Here is where my motto comes into play. You see, I also relate to this wonderful/terrible book because I, too, was a badly broken woman who had no business being a parent. I have never regretted bringing my three now-adult children into the world. I love them all dearly and I’m deeply thankful that my children, grandchildren, and great-grandson are all here. However, when I had my first son at the age of eighteen and a daughter and a second son when I was in my twenties, I had no clue as to how inadequate I would be as their mother. I did not know, way back then, that I have had severe complex PTSD since my early childhood. But even if I had known this, I would never have been able to guess how my emotional condition would impact my children’s lives. PTSD did not become an official psychiatric label until the year before my youngest child was born. But even then, it was years before mainstream psychiatry began to put PTSD together with trauma other than the horror of war. My own PTSD was not diagnosed until the year I turned fifty. When I finally found some real help for what was

“wrong” with me, my children were already grown with children of their own. The psychiatrist who, after a full battery of tests, diagnosed my Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Paul Meier, MD, author or co-author of over eighty books) told me that PTSD is a normal reaction to overwhelming trauma, just as bleeding is a normal reaction to being stabbed.

“Normal,” in this sense, does not mean “healthy.” Obviously, if you are bleeding from a stab wound, you aren’t in the best of health. However, having a PTSD reaction to overwhelming trauma is normal because it does not mean you are inherently weak or crazy or otherwise inferior. The healthiest, strongest, sanest people will bleed if they are stabbed. Likewise, the healthiest, strongest, sanest people can develop PTSD after overwhelming trauma. Modern brain-imaging technologies have revealed that severe trauma actually changes the brain’s structure and function. This is why people with PTSD can’t just “get over it.” Like someone who was paralyzed in a car crash years ago, the traumatic event may be in the distant past, but the injury it caused is still present. Beating a paralyzed person for not getting up and walking does not help them. Likewise, shunning and shaming someone for having PTSD will only make the situation that much worse. I have another motto: Treat PTSD (and all mental illness labels) with C.A.R.E.: Compassion, Acceptance, Respect, and Encouragement. Society’s isolating, humiliating STIGMA against mental illness is, I believe, the primary reason why people like Lori’s mother, people like my parents, and

people like me, don't get help a lot sooner, if ever. This is tragic for the mentally ill and downright criminal when it comes to their innocent, bewildered children. I am tempted to quote more wonderful passages from this well-written, spellbinding book, but I think I've gone on long enough. Take it from me, if you had a mentally ill parent, or if you fall into that category yourself, don't wait, buy this book right now. It's a hard story but it is also a hopeful story that ends well: Lori Schafer, a grown woman with a brilliant mind, a beautiful soul, and a successful life as a Survivor Extraordinaire! I just want to say to the author: You are about my daughter's age right now and I am close to the age your mother was when she died. I'm sorry she was never able or willing to tell you the words you needed and had every right to hear. I'm sorry she never told you how sorry SHE was for being so badly broken and for wounding you almost destroying you with her sharp broken edges. I'm sorry she never told you that you handled it EXACTLY RIGHT: you saved your own life! Any half-way sane mother would want you to do that very thing. This is what being a real mom means. You deserved a normal life, as all children do. You deserved a safe, nurturing childhood, a happy home and plenty of nourishing food and a clean warm comfortable bed of your own. You deserved so much more than you got. You are a daughter that any normal mother would be super thrilled to claim. What you have endured, what you have done with your life despite everything, is absolutely mind-boggling. You did not deserve even one minute of the hell your broken mother put you through. Perhaps she really did do the best she could within the confines of her mental illness. But SHAME on the adults who must have seen what was happening and who took the easy way out of not getting involved. Like I've said to my adult children: telling you that your mother "did the best she could" or "didn't mean to hurt you" may have made her feel better, but it is not helpful to YOU. If a trucker has a heart attack, passes out and unintentionally runs his 18-wheeler right over you understanding that he did the best he could and didn't mean to crush you with his truck, isn't going to make your injuries better. Thank you for writing this book, Lori. I know it couldn't have been easy. I have been trying to write my story for almost forty years and I am still at least a year away from having it ready for publication. If I ever do get it ready, that is. So WOW. You are amazing. Unlike too many memoirs being self-published these days, although your story is a tough one, it is not a downer to read. On the contrary, your book is insightful, helpful, and healing. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

Well done and well written Lori. I am really happy that you found your freedom after all those years

of anxiety and uncertainty. I am happy to know you are in a happier place now.

Henry James's *Turn of the Screw* is one of the most frightening novels I've ever read. It begins with this question: what if two young children were put under the care of a governess who was either 1 - trying frantically and heroically to save them from malevolent ghosts who were out to capture their souls or 2 - insane. I thought the second possibility was by far the scariest. On *Hearing Of My Mother's Death Six Years After It Happened* by Lori Schafer gives us almost the same paradox, but it's drawn from real life and is told by Schafer as she experienced it when she was a girl in her mid-teens. Both parts of the question from *Turn of the Screw* could actually apply to Schafer's book. The governess, or in Schafer's case her mother, is clearly psychotic. But, from the mother's point of view, she is indeed protecting her daughter and herself from malevolent forces. What adds to the power of Schafer's memoir is the terrifying details that she is able to provide as she recounts her experiences in a series of extremely well drawn vignettes. They are organized, she says, randomly. But they really do build until Lori (the real-life character) is able to make her escape. Lori spent two years having her mother force her to hide with her in closets while supposedly DEADLY MEALS were being served. She had all her belongings taken from her and put in storage because they were EVIL. She had to sleep in the same bed as her mother for her own and her mother's PROTECTION; she had to go from house to house in distant neighborhoods, asking if the house they were calling on was SOMEPLACE SAFE. Her mother accused Lori of trying to POISON her, and then being STARVING the girl because her mother thought that Lori's own food might be poisoned. What I find most intriguing about the memoir is that there are really two stories here. There's the *Turn of the Screw*, horror story of Lori being terrorized and persecuted by her mother. But there is also Lori's painful but somehow also wonderful and redeeming tale of survival. Lori applied for and received a full scholarship to UC Berkeley, then had to run away from home and live on the streets till the start of the college school year when she could obtain it. Her savings ran out; she learned to get by eating practically nothing. Living in her car she was afraid that neighbors in the surrounding houses would call the cops and have her taken away. She lost her scholarship before it even began, and after added months of starvation and living on the streets she had to reapply for the grant and was once again rewarded with a life-saving, full scholarship. All of these latter adventures testify to Lori's strength of character,

her intelligence, and (frankly) her talent. That she attributes her toughness and her ability to survive to the skills that she inherited and learned from her mother also testifies, whether she wants to admit it or not, to her generosity. On Hearing Of My Mother's Death Six Years After It Happened is an insightful, worthwhile, and very rewarding reading experience. If you want or need to develop a more complete understanding of mental illness and its effects on everyone involved, read it.

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