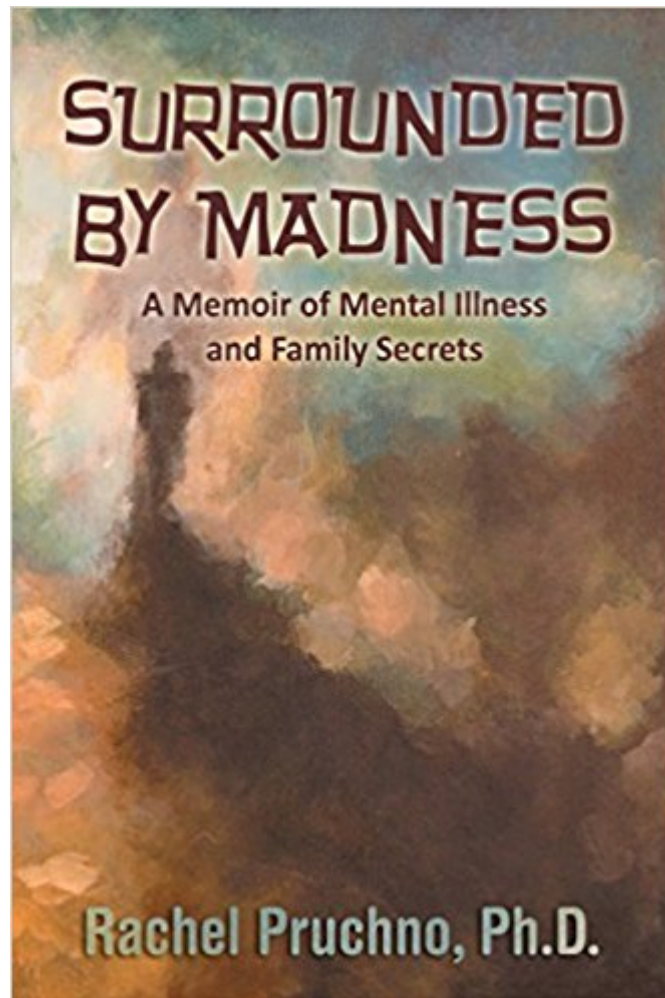




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# Surrounded By Madness: A Memoir Of Mental Illness And Family Secrets



## Synopsis

"What was the likelihood my adopted daughter would have my father's hazel eyes and my mother's mental illness?" In this fiercely candid memoir, Dr. Pruchno, a scientist widely acclaimed for her research on mental illness and families, shows how mental illness threatened to destroy her own family. Not once, but twice. As a child, she didn't understand her mother's episodes of crippling sadness or whirlwind activity. As a mother, she feared her daughter Sophie would follow in the footsteps of the grandmother Sophie never knew. Unraveling the mysteries of her mother's and daughter's illnesses, Pruchno fought to preserve her marriage and protect her son. But it was not until she came to terms with her own secrets that she truly understood the destructive and pervasive effects mental illness has on families. Surrounded By Madness is transforming. It will empower families to stop hiding and start talking when mental illness strikes.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

On the KIRKUS REVIEWS Recommended List of books. Says Kirkus Reviews: "Penned in a vivid, literary style that bleeds anguish, Pruchno's story is a mother's worst nightmare. Since the book centers on a young person and leaves such a powerful impression, it would make a solid supplementary text for a college psychology course. Pruchno's feelings of desperation and powerlessness speak more to the reality of mental illness than an academic case study ever could. An unvarnished look at the destructiveness of mental illness, as told by a person who suffered at the hands of someone else's demons." Reviewed by Mamta Madhavan for Readers' Favorite A heart-breaking memoir of a woman who loses both her mother and daughter to mental

illness. Brings to light the plight of mentally ill patients and how badly equipped the system is to give proper care and support. Gripping and thought provoking. Â The author speaks about how the strangling grasp of mental illness destroys the person and how family members succumb to the stigma of this illness and hide it. The book is a must-read - an empowering story. Â Discussion questions at the end help readers evaluate what the author has tried to convey.

The book trailer video for Surrounded By Madness may be viewed by clicking the link to my author page in the More About The Author section below or by searching for "Surrounded By Madness" on YouTube. More than 11.4 million people in the U.S. experience a mental illness severe enough to cause problems in their daily lives. For every person experiencing a serious mental illness there are family members who suffer as well.Â Â As a child I watched my mother struggle with manic depression. As a mother, I fought beside my adopted daughter, diagnosed with ADHD, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorder. For years, stigma and shame made me keep my mother's and my daughter's illnesses secret.Â Â When my 18-year-old daughter stopped her treatments and ran away with a heroin addict, I knew there was nothing I could do to help her. In my grief, I started writing our story. Â Â Hoping to learn from the experiences of others, I read dozens of memoirs written by people with mental illness and memoirs written by the parents and children of people with mental illness. Each memoir told the same story: turmoil, more turmoil, and then a happy ending. Sometimes the person with mental illness had extensive and expensive contact with the healthcare system, care well beyond the grasp of most people. Other times the recovery was so unbelievable I wondered whether a serious mental illness had really been evident. Â Â I tried to reconcile the stories these memoirs told with the facts that I, a psychologist, knew about mental illness. Where were the memoirs written by people like me? People whose loved ones were homeless, in jail, or dead? Surely I wasn't alone.Â Â It was then that I realized I needed to tell my story so that other families struggling with mental illness would understand they are not alone and that hiding mental illness is destructive.Â Â Surrounded By Madness is the product of a 3-year journey. I worked with a writing coach who helped me understand narrative arc and an editor who helped polish my writing. The comments of my several rounds of early readers helped me learn how to tell my story.Â Â I hope reading Surrounded By Madness encourages families struggling with mental illness to tell their stories and that it helps people who have not had direct contact with mental illness to understand the challenges mental illness presents to family members. Â

Based on the subject matter, I wanted to like this memoir. This book is written in short chapters

which begin with a useful and descriptive title, followed by a less than useful subtitle of date and age of Sophie (author's daughter). The reason I say the dates were not useful is because numerous times the initial paragraph of the chapter jumped to a completely different time period anyway, so the subtitles merely confused me. Most chapters are heavily dialogue-based in a way that felt scripted and unnatural to me, while at the same time serving to 'get to the point' of what the chapter was meant to present. I found myself feeling this would make a terrific "Lifetime" made-for-television movie. As a mental health professional (of the clinical variety), and the mother of a teenage daughter who has gone through very similar struggles, I at times felt at odds with parts of the story, i.e. page 125 when the author phones 911 to report that Rick (Sophie's friend) has a knife and has threatened to kill himself, Rick is taken to hospital and then "released to his mother's care later that evening", or various conversations between the author and her husband and the array of mental health professionals - many of which don't ring true to my personal or professional experience. I do appreciate the story that the author was trying to tell - that of the despair one feels when a loved one is suffering from a mental illness that you cannot control or effect. Her closing chapters are more internal and insightful rather than dialogue-heavy, and this served to provide the clarity of her own mental and emotional process that I would have preferred to see much earlier, and throughout the book. Also, caution should be given that while the author, herself, is a psychologist, she does not have clinical experience nor expertise in the area of mood and emerging personality disorders in children and adolescence. For information, facts, and expertise in these areas, one should look to other sources. I think there is much more to explore, both as an individual and as a writer, in the author's own piece of this puzzle - sandwiched between the abandonment she experienced as a child by her mother, and the replaying of that abandonment of her own daughter during the similar phase of her daughter's life. It took me until half-way through the book to connect to Sophie as a person since she appeared mostly as anecdote after anecdote of her most unpleasant moments, rather than balancing those with more about her intelligence, artistic talents, and empathy. It is Sophie who is the victim in this book. Her mental illness, while effecting her family, is happening to Sophie. I wanted to jump inside the pages and give her a big hug. I am sure the author did this in reality, but it did not come across in the first 90% of the book. The feeling I had while reading was one of burden--that Sophie was a constant burden. What a sad feeling to have about your own daughter. The author redeems herself in the final chapters where she describes that she did have loving feelings throughout Sophie's childhood. What I'm saying is...I wanted more. The story is rushed. Perhaps the author felt the details of the normal day-to-day family life would be boring or irrelevant, but I would not have found them so. I would have felt the wholeness of the family unit and

the bipolar nature of everyone's feelings in the wake of mental illness. I greatest hope is that Sophie survives to tell us her own story one day.

Dealing with a young adult with a mental illness is difficult enough. You start with school issues and get a generic diagnosis of ADHD.. then you deal with eating and weight loss issues and get a diagnosis of eating disorder. then you deal with more school issues, more weight loss issues, substance abuse issues, relationship issues, new diagnoses and suicidal threat issues. What do you do when you think you have tried everything? Rachel Pruchno, from her own experiences, has outlined almost everything our family has gone through and continues to go through. After reading her book, I am finding out that we are doing everything we can do for our daughter (within the limits of this country's mental health system). There are limits placed by the system and limits placed on our family's health and well being. This book is a must read for families and friends of any individual with mental health issues and is a good basis for support group discussions. I plan to bring it up at our next support group meeting. Thank you Rachel Pruchno for sharing.

Dr. Pruchno's book is searingly personal and intense. The feeling is that you can't put the book down as you watch their world careening out of control, with Dr. Pruchno and her husband chasing desperately after the runaway car that their daughter's life has become. There is simply no good answer in our legal or medical system for people like Sophie, who are intelligent, charming, manipulative and completely lacking in insight and awareness of their own illness. Once Sophie hits 18 years of age, it becomes immediately clear that there is little to nothing that Dr. Pruchno and her husband can do to keep Sophie safe. The wrenching decision that must ultimately be made to save what's left of their family is a decision that no parent should ever have to make. If you have ever loved somebody who is suffering from mental illness, if you yourself have struggled with these problems, if you know someone or love someone who struggles with these problems as a parent, as a friend, or as a spouse, I cannot urge you enough to read this book. It may not present all the answers to our limited and far-from-perfect mental health system but if nothing else, it is so important to understand that you are not alone and that the worst thing is to continue keeping secrets. It is time in this country that we have open discourse about better ways to deal with these problems. Dr. Pruchno's book is a stunning and brilliant first step in that direction.

Very well written book. Although some of the chapters were really short and some could have been

combined, it still was well written. I have mental illness in my family and it was interesting to read how another family dealt with their issues. I feel for Rachel and her family. You do need to lean on your family and friends when you are going through this. However, at the end of the book I was left with the feeling, now what?

As any academic knows, mental health battles, whether they be personal or affecting loved ones, are often encouraged to be hidden or kept away from one's academic career. However, this facade is harmful to the many people in academia who are afflicted with mental health issues. Dr. Pruchno's memoir is her raw experience of confronting this stigma with her mentally ill daughter, Sophie, as well as the struggle to keep Sophie well once she became an adult who could legally make her own choices. In the dedication, Dr. Pruchno writes "For families struggling with mental illness: I hope reading my story encourages you to tell yours." I can personally say that her memoir has encouraged me to tell my own story and journey.

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