



Mom, Mania, and Me: Surviving and Changing a Volatile Relationship

Diane Dwyer

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Finalist: Tucson Festival of Books Competition

Trophy Award, Australian NNAAMI and WAYMI

Hope and heartbreak describe Diane Dweller's struggles to improve her dysfunctional relationship with Dixie, her mother. Dixie has periodic spells that start with laughter, parties, and shopping. The fun stops when her actions spiral into manic episodes that devastate Diane.

Will Diane, a scared child, intimidated teen, and insecure adult ever stand up to Dixie? Or gain her approval? How can Diane let go of negative memories and change this turbulent mother-daughter relationship? A series of startling events help Diane discover what works, what doesn't.

Informative and inspiring, this poignant memoir of coping and changing provides hope to others in dysfunctional relationships.

Includes Book Club Questions plus Mental Health Facts, Data and Resources.

Mom, Mania, and Me: Surviving and Changing a Volatile Relationship Details

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From Reader Review Mom, Mania, and Me: Surviving and Changing a Volatile Relationship for online ebook

Liz says

I was fortunate to receive this book via a Goodreads Giveaway. Such an interesting story that was so well written I had to read it all in one sitting.

Carol says

I am so glad that Diane Dweller wrote Mom, Mania, and Me: Surviving and Changing a Volatile Relationship. I have something big in common with her. Her mother and my father both had Bipolar Disorder. While her mother Dixie had more mania than depression. My father had more of a fifty-fifty balance.

This book is a true gift from the author to all who have had a bipolar parent. There is great comfort in knowing that there are others out there going through the same things. Usually I jot down a few notes when I read a book but this one kept me reading the story and thinking to myself. I thought about how our parents were alike like going on robust shopping sprees. There were a lot of differences too. My father gave me plenty of affection and made me feel good about myself. Diane's mother had never learned the importance of hugs and seemed concentrate on correcting Diane constantly and wanted total control.

Diane's childhood was not happy. Her mother made her scared all the time and her father gave affection sometimes, but he was usually away from Diane, working. I really loved what she wrote about the ways that we communicate love. Like Diane, I am a hug giver and would love to give the author a great big warm hug right now.

Besides having to tell her very painful story with courage and truthfulness, she includes a section in the back with questions and answers and a list of resources for families with bipolar disorders. There is also an appendix that is very helpful. Although concisely written, it is so informative.

I received this finished copy, signed by the author of the above book by a win from FirstReads. My thoughts and feelings in this review are totally my own.

Pauline says

A Story of Loss, Love, and Redemption

Mom, Mania, and Me is a story of loss and redemption, and a coming of age story all in one. This memoir is as interesting and as well written as Jeannette Walls' The Glass Castle. The daughter of a doctor, Diane Dweller grows up with all that she needs physically, but her mother's constant criticism creates a deep woundedness that takes decades to heal. Frankly, I do not think that a daughter ever recovers totally from feeling abused and unloved by her mother, but Diane Dweller's journey to redemption is well worth reading.

The memoir begins with her father, Edward's, untimely death in his early 60s, when Diane is 34, but then moves quickly to her earliest childhood recollections. One reads beautifully composed vignettes of incidents the author remembers vividly. Her mother, Dixie, not only whips her frequently with a hairbrush, but she is hypercritical of everything she does, repeatedly declaring her daughters, Gracie (two years older), and Diane unattractive. Her mother expects perfection, and well into her 50s, Diane is unable to deliver on these expectations.

The family resides in Texas and the cultural details of the Southern social environment are beautifully described. Dixie's expectations are driven by "what other's may think," and never by how her daughters' might feel. There were moments in the book reminiscent of *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett.

Dixie has "spells" which we later learn are manic episodes. Most disturbing of all are her manic driving expeditions throughout her life and into her 80s. It is amazing that she never kills anyone.

Diane's early childhood is rough, but her years as a teenager are heart wrenching. She endures excruciating treatments for scoliosis, and while her mother does care for her in a loving fashion, she suffers the many challenges of an adolescent with a disability. Her mother's critique and lack of affection persist, and she escapes from home as soon as she can. Moving to England with an American soldier, she then suffers both verbal abuse and cheating from him. After five years, he leaves her, and Diane's father provides salvation supporting her through both undergraduate and graduate school, facilitating her pursuit of independence and some of her artistic dreams. While Diane's life improves with husband number two who lovingly supports her and her two young children, her mother's life deteriorates once her father dies. A very poignant moment in the book occurs when Diane discovers that she is "becoming her mother" in the ways she treats her children. I was touched by Dweller's honesty.

Her mother's manic episodes of wild driving, excessive activity, and shopping for clothes, houses, cars etcetera, happen frequently, and Diane and Gracie come to the rescue. A few years into this, during a visit home, Dixie suggests seeing a local psychiatrist who prescribes lithium. This magic drug helps immensely, decreasing the manic episodes, though never the constant critique. The problem then evolves into Dixie not being a compliant patient. She feels better and stops taking the pills, so the mania returns.

Dweller's descriptions of her feelings of helplessness and her use of imagery to dispel her old and persisting "mom tapes" are both brilliant and beautifully described. Her many attempts to confront her mother while never showing disrespect are amazing. Dixie is a tough Southern lady throughout her life, survives hip and knee replacements, and even a coma, before succumbing at ninety-two. Dixie's last chapter is touching, illustrating the incredible power of love. Diane and her family love Dixie, and mom changes because of this undying support.

The writing is exquisite. Dweller made me laugh, she made me cry on numerous occasions, and her writing helped me to feel deep empathy for her throughout her journey. Dweller wrote the book to help others who may suffer from mental illness, especially bipolar disorder, but this memoir is so much more than that. It is a story about abuse and its effects, and about how patient, compassionate love can bring salvation. Ruthellen Josselson writes, "we create one another," and this beautifully written memoir illustrates this pronouncement.

Yang Cao says

I can relate a lot to the author.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

Mom, Mania, and Me: Surviving and Changing a Volatile Relationship, by Diane Dwyer is a powerful memoir epitomizing the devastating effect of her mother's bipolar episodes on her family, especially the author. Most of us realize life is hard for those who suffer with mental illness. This is a much needed book to help us understand the effects of mentally ill behaviors and other symptoms on their families as they try to accommodate the special needs of a mentally ill member. Dwyer's first-person account is written like a fast-paced novel, with riveting prologue. She becomes the scapegoat for her mother's many frustrations.

Chapter One begins thirty years after the prologue episode, at her father's funeral. It is the unanticipated event that forces Dwyer and her sister to return to their family home. Their mother, Dixie, is in denial and oblivious; she acts like everything is the same as always. She refuses to wear black and demands her daughters not wear black to the funeral. Her rapid speech and manic behaviors worry the sisters; they had always believed their mother would die first. Her doctor-father provides well for her mother, but Dixie decides she wants an airplane and a pilot to take her wherever she decides to go. Dad did well, but not that well. Dixie starts another manic roll.

Dwyer's story slowly unfolds with each chapter. Against her parent's wishes, she forgoes college and marries an Air Force pilot at seventeen. She follows him to England to escape her mother's constant criticism and cruelty. Her handsome young husband forgets his charming courtship manners and becomes even crueler than her mother, with constant criticism and philandering. They have a baby boy. Dwyer is young, lonely, and scared, with no self-esteem and living in foreign country. She does not tell her parents how bad things are.

Dwyer ends up back in Texas with two small children, alone, trying to go to night school and work to support her children. Her father offers to support her and the children while she finishes college as well as paying her tuition. Dixie becomes angry since that decreases the money she has for shopping. Dwyer finally helps her mother find a psychiatrist, who helps Dixie with the right medication. But as with many other bipolars, every time she begins to stabilize, Dixie convinces herself she is well and stops the medicine. Dwyer calls the doctor, and he reaches out to Dixie, who likes and respects him. On these occasions it seems the doctor's widow receives a bit more compassionate care from a busy psychiatrist than an ordinary patient might receive.

Dwyer is treated for hypothyroidism since she was ten, but it flares out of control after the birth of her youngest daughter, including mood swings and painful physical symptoms. Finding the right treatment proves to be a long and difficult journey. An unsympathetic doctor refuses to listen to her concerns; this experience helps Dwyer understand what her mom has been going through year after year.

At the end of the book Dwyer lists contact information for eight national organizations that offer support to the mentally ill and their families. She believes that a change is needed in the HIPAA privacy policy to allow family members to contact the doctor of their loved ones, because the needs of their children should be paramount or at least equal to the needs of the mentally ill. As a former long-time psychiatric nurse, I completely agree.

by Ann McCauley

John says

Diane Dwyer's *Mom, Mania, and Me* is a timely book. There are an estimated 7 million people in the U.S. with significant bipolar disorder and about 7 million more with a less severe form.* With the conservative assumption that for these 14 million individuals their disorder disrupts the relationship with 3 to 4 of their family members and/or friends, then there are more than 60 million people directly or indirectly affected by this disorder in the U.S. alone. Advances in treatment have occurred in past decades, but even today the majority of bipolar individuals will relapse in less than 2 years.*

In this book Dwyer vividly imparts to the reader a firsthand experience of growing up in a household with a bipolar parent. To say it was not easy is an understatement. Beyond the day to day difficulty of living with a dysfunctional mother, the emotional damage had long-lasting effects on Dwyer, with the invisible scars persisting far beyond childhood. In spite of this most difficult home environment, Dwyer eventually overcame substantial, early obstacles to create a rich personal life.

Mom, Mania, And Me makes no attempt to go deeply into the diagnosis or medical management of bipolar disorder, but it does provide insight into how very difficult is the task of growing, maturing, and creating a sense of self-worth when one's parent is so unpredictable, unreliable, and even unloving.

While the central focus of the book is an adolescent living with a bipolar parent, anyone close to a bipolar relative, friend or even estranged parent will benefit from this story. They will find "*Mom, Mania, and Me*" not just informative, but a source of understanding, hope, and even inspiration.

* Lancet. 2013 May 11; 381(9878)
