



Circles Around The Sun: In Search Of A Lost Brother

Molly McCloskey

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When Molly McCloskey was a young girl, her brother Mike - fourteen years her senior - started showing signs of paranoid schizophrenia. By the time Molly was old enough to begin to know him, he was frequently delusional, heavily medicated, living in hospitals or care homes or on the road. This title tells her story.

Circles Around The Sun: In Search Of A Lost Brother Details

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Jessica says

This book was so sad that it was kind of depressing to read. Molly McCloskey is the youngest of 6 children and in this book she explores her oldest brother, Mike's, descent into schizophrenia and how that affected her family. There is a 14 year age difference between Molly and Mike, so they were already separated by age. She was only 9 when Mike was diagnosed and barely remembered any specifics. The book goes back and forth between the past and present and also Molly's own adult life. Because Mike got heavily into drugs and the hippie movement of the 1970's in college, it was hard for their family to tell when he first started showing signs of mental illness whether it was the drugs or something worse. After he was diagnosed he drifted around the country, often was homeless, and just struggled. The book ends in 2009 with Mike suddenly and without an obvious reason refusing to see or talk to anyone in his family. The book was so sad and I can't imagine dealing with what Molly's family has with Mike and what Mike has experienced as well.

Jane says

In *Circles Around the Sun: In Search of a Lost Brother*, Molly McCloskey takes an intimate, personal, sometimes painful look at life in her family growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the focus is on her oldest brother Mike, diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 23, McCloskey also examines her own anxiety, the break-up of her parents' marriage, and the dynamic between siblings.

The author is the youngest of six children; her brother Mike is the oldest. She has no clear memories of Mike before he became ill. Throughout her adult life she has wanted to write about Mike, and this book is the culmination of her efforts to learn about him and his life and how his illness affected her entire family. One of the most touching exchanges in the book comes when she asked Mike, "Do you mind being in this book I'm writing about the family?" "I would expect to be," he replied. Then he added, "I don't murder anyone, do I? Do you write murder mysteries?" "No," the author replied, "you don't murder anyone."

Mike's mother and siblings have made a determined effort to stay in touch with him as he copes with his mental illness. McCloskey perfectly describes awkward meetings at a restaurant near his group home that made me cringe in discomfort. She captures the physical changes that the drugs have on her brother, causing me to feel great sympathy for those prescribed loxapine (an antipsychotic), lithium (a mood stabilizer), and similar drugs. They help control the illness but have a great detrimental affect on one's physical well-being.

The author spends a lot of time talking about her own life and mental health challenges given that the book is presented as being primarily about her brother. There is a lot of background about how her parents met, fell in love, had six children, grew apart, and divorced.

Circles Around the Sun is as much a picture of American life in the 60s and 70s as it is an examination of schizophrenia. Scattered throughout the book are family pictures, which felt very familiar to me since I am around the same age as the author. The photos struck a real cord with me and are the biggest strength of the book.

There is no orchestrated happy ending for *Circles Around the Sun*. Life goes on for Mike in his group home,

for Molly dealing with her own anxiety, and for the rest of her family. Circles Around the Sun is a sad book, but one worth reading if you are related to or spend time around someone with mental illness.

I read an advance reading copy; Circles Around the Sun will be available in October 2012.

Katie says

Skipped a lot of pages....better books have been written on this subject.

Summers says

I'm not sure how I picked up this book but I think it was because the name sounded familiar and I do like to read biographies. This book is really more about the author's feelings and experiences, but does explain a great deal about schizophrenia. Helped me understand so much more and gain a little insight into what families and the individual must go through. Not a casual read.

Jennifer says

Not as good as I had hoped. The author jumped around alot along the timeline of events and that made it difficult sometimes for me to keep track of where they were - especially since the family moved around alot and so did the author in her adult life. Overall, though a good story on her brother's illness and how a family can be completely blindsided by it. I disagree with reviews that she talks too much about herself. She is very clear that she is going to cover how her brother's illness affects the entire family and she talks about her own depression and anxiety - and the fear that she too will have schizophrenia.

Gail says

What started out for me as a very well-written book slowly began to fall apart. While other reviewers (on the back of the book) hail McCloskey as a gifted writer, I tend to disagree. There's many problems mostly with her excessive use of metaphors. This book could have been much shorter.

She writes way too much about herself especially when the title of the book is about her brother falling prey to schizophrenia. I couldn't wait to be done with the whole thing.

Betty says

The story of a young man's journey into schizophrenia, his resulting life, and the effects on his family and friends. His sister, the author, describes in great detail this journey with in-depth discussion of his symptoms, his diagnosis, treatments, and known research about schizophrenia. I found it to be quite interesting although it is not a quick or light read.

Erik says

This well-written memoir of the author and her family as they adapt to a brother with schizophrenia is also a portrait of the 20th and early 21st centuries as seen by three generations of her family, with college basketball and geopolitics a backdrop. The "360 degree" biographical approach, which included conversations, relationship details, and excerpts from letters with virtually everyone who McCloskey knew to have come in contact with her brother over his long lifetime, was a fascinating approach to understanding the life of someone as impenetrable and withdrawn as those diagnosed with schizophrenia typically are.

Kathleen says

Must read for those with schizophrenia in family history. Or for professionals working with this population. Or for humans wishing to expand understanding of potential human condition.

Holly says

Molly McCloskey writes about her oldest brother, Mike, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was in his early twenties. The book was much as I expected it to be - a sad story about a boy with potential whose life is ruined by this incurable mental illness. McCloskey examines the effect her brother's illness has on her parents (most especially her mother), her siblings, and Mike's close friends. The book is well-researched, and seems to be a writer's journey to answer questions and resolve issues that have impacted her life.

Cathryn Chandler says

There is a lot of empathy for Molly McCloskey-- dealing with a mental illness in the family, and especially one as baffling as schizophrenia, has torn more than one family apart, and can be heartbreaking for everyone in the family. But I didn't get the feeling in this book that Molly really found her older brother, Mike, at all. It seems as if the 14 year difference in their ages didn't allow her to have a good perspective on him before he got sick, and there wasn't all that much about him-- aside from reporting on his immediate behavior-- after he got sick either. The book may have been more effective if she had included much more of the feelings, thoughts and insights for her brother Tim, who was only two years behind Mike and, by her own statement, was the most affected by the drastic change in Mike brought on by the disease. I didn't get the impression she really understood schizophrenia, and that she hadn't talked to anyone else who had a family member who suffered from it. There was a lot in the book about her (and Tim's) struggle with alcohol-- but she never linked it to what happened to Mike and the splintering of her family. The struggle her Mother had also seemed rather muted, as though Molly really couldn't relate to that either. Having seen this disease up close and for years in an extended-family member, I may be a bit biased-- but right to the end, Molly really didn't seem to know much about Mike.

Octopusturtle says

This is a look into a family whose oldest son suffers from schizophrenia. It was written by his younger sister and includes saved letters from family members.

The love, introspection, bewilderment and questions are all there. It is a glimpse into the family dynamics and sadness as a result.

I have had a couple of close people in my life in the same situation. It was a source of information and support about the disease.

Liz says

I didn't enjoy this book. It was boring and i ended up merely flipping thru the pages; only reading the first few and last chapters. I gave it two stars instead of one because i recognize that I'm a though critic and there was nothing wrong her writing.

Barbara Suozzi says

Depressing and a little disappointing. The book was more about the author's world travels and her anxiety that didn't seem connected to her brother's illness than about the brother's schizophrenia. I guess writing about how the disease affects sibs is as baffling as the disease itself.

Kmcdale says

“My abiding wish was that my brother would quietly, miraculously, and without causing pain to anyone, as though he were simply ascending into heaven, disappear,” (Circles around the sun, page 6). How does a mother visit a son that has completely changed from the one she raised. How does a sister continue to love a brother she doesn’t recognize. How does a family cope with the figurative loss of a life.

In Circles Around the Sun, Molly McCloskey gives us a glimpse into what it’s like to have a brother with paranoid schizophrenia. From life before, to diagnoses, to how she moved on with her life, the story of their lives is definitely not a happy one. I’ve read multiple books with multiple points of view on schizophrenia and other taboo mental illnesses and i appreciated the honesty in this one. The author didn’t pretend to understand the disease nor did she try to make it sound like there was anything positive about what happened to her brother. Circles Around the Sun starts off with what life was like before Mike was diagnosed. By doing this, she creates an attachment to him that makes it all the more difficult to continue reading once the disease sets in. McCloskey has a simplistic form of writing that makes it easier to comprehend the disease and the timeline of their lives. Throughout the book, you get to experience their seemingly perfect family fall apart. If you’re interested in psychology and the personal aspects of mental illnesses, this book would be perfect for you. It's easy to go on google and search what schizophrenia and what the symptoms are but it's much more difficult to understand how a person with schizophrenia lives and how it affects others in the victims life.

I thoroughly enjoyed McCloskeys writing and i’m excited to check out her other books!

