



Thirty Rooms to Hide In: Insanity, Addiction, and Rock 'n' Roll in the Shadow of the Mayo Clinic

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“‘The Shining’ . . . but funnier.”

That's how the author describes his memoir *Thirty Rooms To Hide In: Insanity, Addiction, and Rock 'n' Roll in the Shadow of the Mayo Clinic*.

It's the story of six boys growing up in a great dark house in Minnesota, as the father – a respected surgeon – goes slowly insane. With winters raging outside and the father raging within, it is their mother's protection that allows the boys to have a wildly fun, thoroughly dysfunctional time growing up. With dark humor as the coin of their realm, and the Beatles as true north on their compass of Cool, the band of brothers make movies, start a rock & roll group, and wise-crack their way through a grim landscape of their father's insanity, Eisenhower's Cold War, fallout shelters, and JFK's assassination.

Thirty Rooms to Hide In: Insanity, Addiction, and Rock 'n' Roll in the Shadow of the Mayo Clinic Details

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From Reader Review *Thirty Rooms to Hide In: Insanity, Addiction, and Rock 'n' Roll in the Shadow of the Mayo Clinic* for online ebook

Janet says

Sometimes a book comes along at the right time in your life. I saw a review of this on Goodreads and was pulled in both by the review and by the title's reference to the Mayo Clinic where I had surgery this past winter. Since it wasn't a new release I figured I could get it from my local library. Alas, no, but I was able to get a copy through interlibrary loan. By the time I got around to picking it up, I had less than a week to read it before it was due back so it came to the top of my TBR.

The story is a memoir about a family torn apart by the father's alcoholism. He also happens to be a distinguished orthopedic surgeon at the Mayo Clinic, which just proves that no mind is too great to waste. Coincidentally, this book came to me at a time when one of my best friends just checked her husband into rehab so I read it watchfully for clues that I might be able to help her. Having no first hand experience of alcoholism in my own life, I find it to be a very mysterious disease. Time and again, alcoholics will sober up, strike the right path, and relapse. Why when they see the havoc it wreaks? Sullivan provides some insight but not enough to truly understand. He paints the alcoholic as emotionally bereft, a person who only feels "normal" when he/she drinks and totally selfish. I raced through this book to its inevitable conclusion, although the final page was something of a shocker. Would love to discuss this book with others who have read it.

Judy Bucciarelli says

Great book about survival in a dysfunctional family due to severe alcoholism. I liked it because it was a true story based on the diaries of the boys in the family plus interviews with them as adults. Also, the author had a very sarcastic and funny way of describing things in the midst of the insanity.

Patricia says

This isn't a book I normally would choose to read! I was up at my daughter's home in Rochester, Minnesota! It was lying on her dining room table. As an avid reader, of course I picked it up to check out what she had her nose in. She wasn't home and I hadn't anything else to do. She is a Nurse Practitioner at Mayo and just entered her 20th year there.

When I had read the first pages, I knew I would have to read it and downloaded it on my kindle. I read it in three days. Page turner!

Yet, as I finished, I put it down in sorrow for Luke's family! So much emotion! Yet, I appreciate it that Luke was so attuned to his emotions and had the capability to put his sorrow and anger and disappointments of an anguished childhood that he shared with his mom and five brothers. I, too, witnessed the pain wrought by a relative that was an alcoholic that destroyed a family. That man, too, died an early death. Every chapter I finished, brought back the sorrow and anguish I felt for a sister and her daughters. I felt the loss and pain of a charismatic man who lost his way in life due to alcoholism. Drugs and alcohol! The destruction lasts a person's lifetime! Regrets....so many what ifs!!!! But we can't go back and change any of it!

Florence (Lefty) MacIntosh says

4 1/2 stars Hooked by the title, deadly isn't it:) Neither alcoholism or domestic violence are class conscious, good to come across a tell-all about a wealthy family for a change. The father, a highly respected doctor spirals into self-destruction. Matter of fact rather than gloomy, it just is what it is. Clever writing, always candid, often raw, his sense of the absurd keeps it real and yes - even entertaining. Opens at the funeral with the six boys fighting for self control, not of their overwhelming grief but to stop themselves from breaking out in hysterical laughter. Keeping up appearances all part of it but having to listen to a pack of lies about what a fabulous man he was with a straight face...seriously?

"He'd wondered whether, after our father's eulogy, the minister might allow "fifteen minutes for rebuttal"

All the boys adopt that **smart-ass attitude**, that slap on the back "I'm good" thing they're famous for - as their way of coping. *"We relished the dysfunction of it. Being different was cool"*

A surprisingly good time capsule of the 50's and 60's as well. The 50's when *"Lies, sexual repression, public relations, and cheerfulness were the culture. Such were the times – no alcoholics, only party boys. - No spousal abuse, only "spats with the wife."* The 60's have The Beatles arriving just in time to take over as role models, loved how the boys found refuge in the **honesty** of rock 'n roll. Most of the credit belongs with Myra though. An amazing, intelligent woman with the courage and maternal instincts of a lioness.

Cons: Snarky humour can wear thin, that and the demonizing of the alcoholic, shocked by the lack of sympathy. Just my feelings, it's his memoir and he calls it how he sees it - still. While he's definitely clever, he comes across a bit immature.

Meanderings: this would make for a great book club read – worth talking about. My spin, sad that the author never sought help for himself – 40+ years later he's stuck in the blaming / anger phase, hope he can let it go – kicker of an epilogue...

Gretchen Cooper says

I enjoyed this book very much. The website is also amazing with bonus photos not shown in the book. I have wondered after reading if the author had not put in the years of research and time dedicated to writing his family's story, it probably would have forever fallen into the depths of forgotten history. Kudos to Mr. Sullivan, his brothers, and his mother, Myra, for their courage to tell the truth about their own lives for our benefit and pleasure. Love it!

Tom Lichtenheld says

A refreshingly optimistic account of growing up in a family lorded over by an alcoholic father. Sure, there are the grim stories of threats, abuse and abandonment, but overall the message is that, under the guidance of a nurturing mother, this family of boys not only survived, but made the most of growing up in the 1960s.

Three things helped them make it through relatively unscathed; mother, music, and - as boys - being blessed with a shortage of emotional dramatics over their hellish situation. Sure, dad's a drunk, but hey, look, the Beatles are on Ed Sullivan!!

Julie says

This was a sad, funny, insightful story of survival by an entire family. Currently living in Rochester, MN and really found it interesting as I could 'see' the landmarks in the tale as it unfolded. It was a bit jumpy and meandering but as a true tale this is to be expected. Still amazed the family survived, even though some scars along the way as to be expected from this ordeal!

Ashley says

This is the unforgettable story about a well-respected surgeon at the Mayo Clinic who was lucky to also be the husband of a beautiful and intellectual wife and the father of six rambunctious boys. Unfortunately, Dr. Roger Sullivan also battled dark demons and an addiction to alcohol which not only ruined his own life and career but the life of his wife and the childhood of six innocent children.

The book opens with a poem written by Luke's mother Myra Longstreet Sullivan. The very first line sets up the haunting tragic tone that will continue throughout the book. The opening line says, "You disappeared before they were born, all of them - except maybe the first when you weren't quite gone just beginning to go- ... and so the story goes. Roger and Myra, college sweethearts, marry and start a family. They survive on Roger's earnings as a college medical school student and raise their first little boy, who is soon joined by a brother, then another brother and as the years tick by Roger is hired by the highly respected Mayo Clinic, they buy a beautiful thirty room home, nicknamed the Millstone, in Minnesota and build a family of six handsome sons.

On the outside they were living the 1950's American Dream but on the inside it was a home of verbal and physical abuse, drunken rages, shame, pain, embarrassment, anger and lies. The boys developed their own coping mechanisms. They found hiding places (in those thirty rooms) and outside, they learned to climb onto the roof and scale the nearby water tower. The older two released their anger and frustration in music by forming their own locally popular rock 'n' roll band, The Pagans. The boys were the best of friends and learned to look out for and take care of each other. The re-tellings of their childhood games and pranks were, at times, hilarious. They were a great reprieve away from the abusive stories of their father and the sadness of their mother. (Their mother, she had to have been an amazing woman! How she survived that decade and managed to raise six boys who all turned out to be wonderful and successful men is amazing.)

Thirty Rooms to Hide In is, at times, hilarious and heart-warming and, at others, terrifying and depressing. I would laugh til my ribs hurt and then cry until I was emotionally exhausted and yet I couldn't put it down. If you read it, and I highly recommend that you do, you should read it in conjunction with reviewing his website, [www . thirtyroomstohidein . com](http://www.thirtyroomstohidein.com). There are family photos and copies of letters, audio of his brothers band and home videos.

Betty says

It was hard to assign stars to this one.... I couldn't put it down, but it also made me very sad, so it seems odd to say I really liked it... but I did. The events in the book took place in my town, I know many of the people involved, I know the house well as it's current owners are good friends of ours and I certainly understand what it means to be part of the Mayo Clinic "family". This all left me feeling almost anxious about peering so deeply into windows of the Millstone, it felt a bit too much like snooping. The collected paper memories of a family of writers give a unique view into their shared reality!

Diane S ? says

I could use many words to describe this heartfelt memoir. Words like insightful, compassionate, heartbreaking but most of all it is a memoir about a family. A family that started out like all families, actually a little above socioeconomically, as the father is a respected neurosurgeon at the Mayo clinic. It shows how insidious the effects of drugs and alcohol are on a person and the whole family structure. How easily one become enslaved and how hard it is to throw the addiction off. Six boy, one mother, so many of these stories were delightful, humorous and ones I could definitely relate to having 5 boys myself. Their mother was a remarkable woman, in the fifties few options were open for a woman alone, and with six children even less. Yet she did the best she could, actually she coped remarkably well. That her sons love her is apparent as well. This is a brave, no holds barred, but not without many incidents of humor and love, told memoir about an ordinary family that had to deal with extraordinary circumstances.

Sarah Hulcy says

THIRTY ROOMS TO HIDE IN by Luke Longstreet Sullivan

Luke Sullivan is one of six sons of Dr. Charles Roger Sullivan, who led the Mayo Clinic Orthopedic Surgery section in the 1950s and -60s. He chronicles the odyssey of his family as Dr. Sullivan descends slowly but surely into the nightmare of alcoholism, dragging his wife, Mary, and their children through the madness and horror. This is a brutally honest narrative of growing up in the insanity that develops around an alcoholic parent. The medical community's "knowledge" of alcoholism then was based on a lack of information, false assumptions and the societal paradigm wherein a husband and father had "most favored status" in family life, both legal and personal. Among most men of that era, there was a "club" mentality of protecting and covering for all members, accepting their excuses for bad behavior, favoring them in family disputes, discounting wives and other family members words, thus condoning the behavior and facilitating its continuance.

Luke Sullivan illustrates the love and humor in the lives of his siblings and parents, with descriptions of the hilarious antics of the brothers reminiscent of Jean Kerr's "Please Don't Eat the Daisies" as they do stupid, dangerous, creative, things in their thirty-room home and on the several acres surrounding it. He shows how each family member develops in the armed camp atmosphere of their dysfunctional family over the years and how the brothers both bond together and isolate while dealing with their father's alcoholism. Some activities were seriously dangerous (!) but they managed to survive their own childhood and become successful, well-adjusted adults.

The real hero was Mary Sullivan who learned to protect and raise her sons in as loving and healthy a way possible, despite the constantly deteriorating personal climate of their lives. A highly intelligent, erudite woman who maintained her sanity through a lifetime correspondence with her father, her only source of emotional support, Mary strove to protect her children from their father's verbal/emotional abuse, including taking all six and going to a motel to spend the night as Dr. Sullivan's drinking became more out of control.

Luke Sullivan is a true "insider" who not only did exhaustive research about how each person in the family felt and responded to the stress in their lives, but who writes as one who has learned pretty much everything known about the disease of alcoholism. He writes without bitterness or anger at the cards he and his family were dealt and paints a poignant picture of their struggles and triumphs, with honesty and love, including the description of his father as a brilliant, dedicated, driven man striving to improve knowledge in his field for the betterment of all, who suffered from a devastating disease that ruined his life and destroyed his relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

The story of this highly personal subject, without blaming or whining about the injustice of it all, is well-written and admirable. I highly recommend this book to anyone -- not just those whose lives have been touched or scarred by alcoholism. "Thirty Rooms to Hide In" is a testament to the strength of the human spirit to overcome adversity, quietly compelling and inspiring.

I thank the publisher for providing me a free copy in exchange for a review. I will post it on Amazon, B&N, Goodreads, LibraryThing and my blog at www.museofhellreviews.wordpress.com

Bethica says

I don't really care for non-fiction memoirs, but this book was recommended by a friend. It's started off pretty decent and the chapters are short so it'll be a good one to bring with to work to read on breaks.

Update some months later after starting.....just couldn't do it. Sorry Sullivan.

Jenny says

This book is a memoir about a father whose drinking and mental illness led to his terrorizing his family, but it's also a memoir of a time, specifically the late 50's and early 60's. In this era, the father Roger took a job at the Mayo Clinic and moved his family (his wife Myra and their 6 boys) into a mansion he called Millstone, where the boys lived rambunctious, energetic years waging imaginary wars against each other, getting a TV set, building a bomb shelter, playing pranks, setting fires, and literally climbing the walls of the house. They also lived through the deterioration of their father and sustained verbal and physical abuse until his accidental death in 1966. It's a testimony to Myra, who because of the time could not truly leave/escape and instead stayed, sustaining abuse and protecting her family as she did. There were moments of hope—a period in a hospital to try and dry Roger out—but the medical knowledge of alcoholism and its treatment at that time led to dashed hope. It's more of a multi-genre book than a traditional memoir, filled with photographs, excerpts from letters and diaries, and links to videos and songs accessible on the book's website. This disjointed narrative moved forward at times in a herky-jerky manner, but to be honest that more than likely reflects the disjointed nature of their lives at the time. A compelling read.

Ann Schaffer says

Have you ever been at a friend's or spouse's family reunion, and people sit around reminiscing about the good ole' days? Yes, the stories are amusing, but the storytellers and characters in the stories are more entertained than newcomers. That's how I felt reading this book. It was kind of funny, but maybe not exactly worth the time I invested.

I may have liked the book more if it had been properly titled and marketed. It wasn't what I expected. This is a memoir about six imaginative and rambunctious brothers. Their mother is a saint, and their father is a full-blown alcoholic who is often missing. There is no insanity, very little rock 'n' roll, and no connection to "The Shining". If I had to compare it to a book, I would say it's trying to be "Let's Pretend This Never Happened" by Jennifer Lawson, except it's not NEARLY as clever.

What I did find interesting is the cultural description of the 50's, especially how alcoholism hadn't been defined as a disease. I also enjoyed the photos and thought they added a lot to the stories. So there's that.

Melki says

We didn't know whether to weep or burst out laughing. So we laughed.

I hate the term "emotional roller coaster," but I can think of no better description for this book.

One minute I'm roaring at the antics of six brothers growing up during the fifties and sixties. Holy crap! I would not have survived these kids! My husband, who was once a part of a three-brother wrecking crew, was forced to listen to me read entire paragraphs featuring exploits of unimaginable destruction - fingernail polish used as paint to decorate hallway walls, innumerable items flushed, jugs of bleach poured into boxes of Tide, heirloom china used as stacking toys, and framed artwork assembled into forts. He shook his head, and I could tell he was thinking, "Why the hell didn't *we* think of that stuff?"

These descriptions of childhood are priceless, conjuring so many sights, smells, and fondly-remembered incidents from my own past.

Army Guy rules were fairly specific, one of which required you to produce a realistic machine gun noise.

If you were out in the open and you heard the ack-ack-ack, you were dead. Since losing was unacceptable, you made your peace with being killed by winning in the Best Death category. Nobody died as good as you. You flung yourself to the ground, overacting a death rattle that could be heard from the cheap seats . . . Your hands went to your stomach, your legs crumpled and then stillness.

Falling to the spongy green grass, that was death for us - your face to the Minnesota sky, the sunlight turning eyelid blood vessels into orange spider-webs. There you lay, certain your showy death had given a sort of murderer's remorse to your assailant, and you waited until the battle ended or Mom called you in for sandwiches. To us, that's all death was - a brief midsummer stillness and then a

sandwich.

Now here comes the roller coaster part . . .

These idyllic scenes of a boyhood well-lived are frequently interrupted by an alcoholic and abusive father.

"WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO AROUND HERE? KNOCK SOME HEADS TOGETHER?"

Okay, most of our dads have probably said that at one time or another. But has your dad ever ~~said~~ yelled this to you and/or your mother?

"WELL, THEN I'LL JUST GO OUT TO THE TOOL SHED AND GET THE AXE AND SMASH THIS GODDAMNED DOOR IN! WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?"

This was the ~~highlight~~ lowlight of what became known in the family as the "Axe Incident."

The real heart of this memoir is the boys' mother, a gentle woman who loved books and reading, and, somehow, her vitriolic, tormentor of a husband. Much of the book consists of her detailed and beautifully written letters to her beloved father. (*This* was one thing that irked me - her parents KNEW of the verbal AND physical abuse their daughter was enduring, and offered NOTHING other than words of encouragement. Then again, this was the fifties. Men were not alcoholics. They were tipsy "party boys," like Dean Martin. Domestic abuse? Nonexistent.)

Mom took refuge in her library, the one room she could call her own. The boys? Well, they had thirty rooms to hide in.

Little boys who lived in the quiet Midwest of the 1950s were, of course, under constant attack by armed hordes and so forts had to be constructed everywhere. A ring of pillows in your bed. A blanket over a card table. and no matter where the fort went up, that outer wall was key - it separated Them from Us. Inside the wall you had sovereignty. A room to hide in and outlast any siege . . .

This is one of the better books I've read this year, and one roller coaster ride I'd recommend.

Here's one more *good* childhood memory I enjoyed:

In the winter, our front yard became a Currier & Ives print done by Quentin Tarantino. We created a vicious brand of snowball pressed to the density of croquet balls. Creating ordnance took fifteen minutes of packing and squeezing after which we misted them with water and put them in the freezer for an icy sheen. If a snowball could somehow be made in Hell, this was it. Parking one of these babies between the shoulder blades of a retreating brother was a satisfying experience and when one of us came into the house crying, within half an hour his parka was back on and he was out in the yard using his anger to squeeze a new snowball to the density of a diamond.

Ah, to be young again . . .
