



A Legacy of Madness: Recovering My Family from Generations of Mental Illness

Tom Davis

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Dorothy Winans 'Dede' Davis had worried, fussed, and obsessed for the last time. Her heart stopped beating in a fit of anxiety, soon after her wobbly legs gave way. In the wake of his mother's death, Tom Davis knew one thing: Helplessly self-absorbed and severely obsessive compulsive, Dede led a tormented life. She had moved from nursing home to mental institution in recent years, but what *really* caused her death? The story of a loving family coming to grips with its own fragilities, *A Legacy of Madness* relays Tom Davis's journey to uncover, and ultimately understand, the history of mental illness that led generations of his suburban American family to their demise. Investigating his mother's history led to that of Davis's grandfather, a top administrator at one of the largest psychiatric hospitals in the country; his great-grandfather who died of self-inflicted gas asphyxiation during the Depression; and his great-great grandmother who, with her eldest son, completed suicide one tragic day. Ultimately, four generations of family members showed clear signs of depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and alcoholism--often mistreated illnesses that test one's ability to cope.

Through this intimate memoir we join Davis on a personal odyssey to ensure that the fifth generation--he and his siblings--recover their family legacy, by not only surviving their own mental health disorders but by getting the help they need to lead healthy, balanced lives. In the end, we witness Davis's powerful transition as he makes peace with the past and heals through forgiveness and compassion for his family--and himself.

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