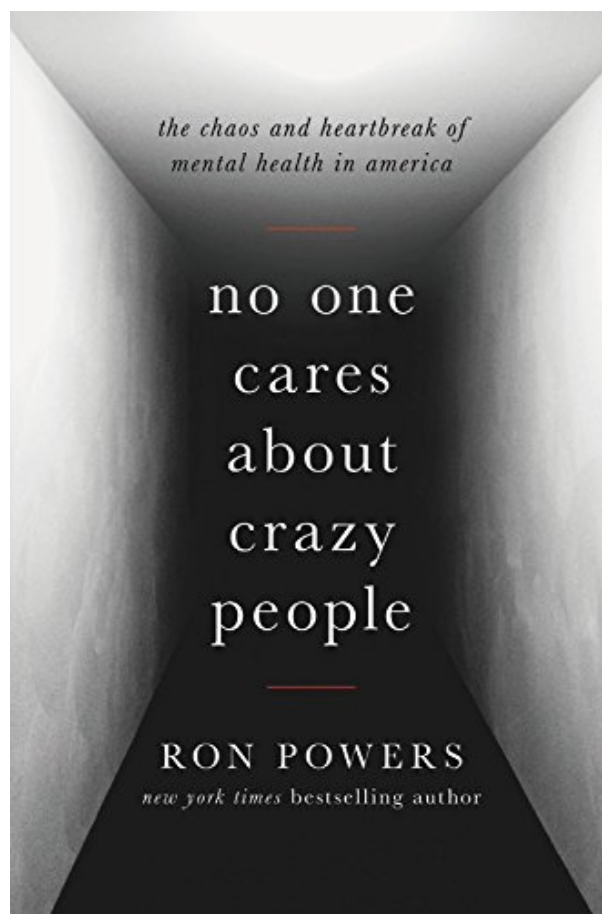
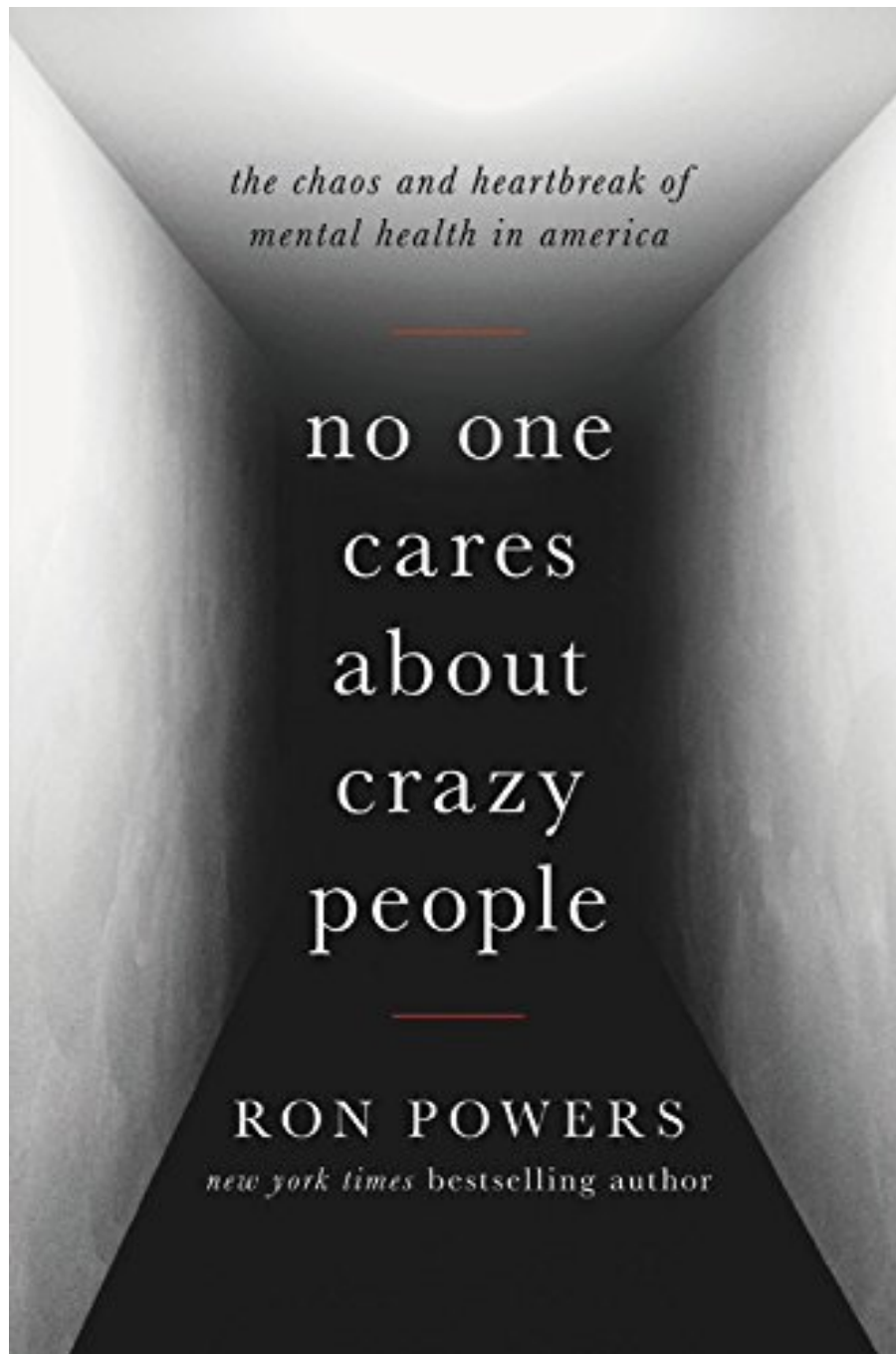


**NO ONE CARES ABOUT CRAZY PEOPLE:
THE CHAOS AND HEARTBREAK OF
MENTAL HEALTH IN AMERICA BY RON
POWERS**



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From the centuries of torture of "lunatics" at Bedlam Asylum to the infamous eugenics era to the follies of the anti-psychiatry movement to the current landscape in which too many families struggle alone to manage afflicted loved ones, Powers limns our fears and myths about mental illness and the fractured public policies that have resulted.

Braided with that history is the moving story of Powers's beloved son Kevin--spirited, endearing, and gifted--who triumphed even while suffering from schizophrenia until finally he did not, and the story of his courageous surviving son Dean, who is also schizophrenic.

A blend of history, biography, memoir, and current affairs ending with a consideration of where we might go from here, this is a thought-provoking look at a dreaded illness that has long been misunderstood.

- Sales Rank: #268 in Books
- Published on: 2017-03-21
- Released on: 2017-03-21
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.25" w x 6.38" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages

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A manifesto, memoir, plea, rant, and a call to action

By Nathan Webster

Early in this powerful book, Ron Powers writes that he doesn't want readers to "enjoy" it: mission accomplished. It's frustrating, depressing and mostly infuriating what a bad job the US has done with mental health care. On the other hand, while Powers is clearly biased to his viewpoint, he does a good job providing the historical context to explain why (wrong) decisions made sense at the time.

Powers has a strongly personal connection to all this - both his sons suffered from various degrees of schizophrenia, which ultimately killed his youngest. As he describes, 'schizophrenia' is not multiple personalities as much a breakdown in how the brain processes information (I'm vastly simplifying) and worse, the brain is telling itself that it's fine - it must be terrifying to suffer. It makes sense that creative people would be predisposed to this, because their brain is working in ways most people's don't (again, vast simplification).

The book does a strong job of switching between historical and current research and then back to Powers' own stories - it never goes through a "boring" stretch, and Powers is able to make the ins-and-outs of mental illness understandable to a layman's audience. As a reporter who went to Iraq several times, I'm obviously familiar with the causes/symptoms of PTSD, and so I had some context for Powers' research - but any reader is going to have no problems understanding what's going on.

Now....Powers is in full self-justification mode and he does not try to see all sides all the time. His oldest son injured a passenger in a near-fatal car accident, and Powers (unsurprisingly) defends his son a lot. The other parents wanted a sentence that was probably a little harsh for a non-drunk-driving accident, but I'd be angry too, I'm sure. So the excuses, etc. on Powers' part were understandable, but a bit much. However, the story is important, because his son's first descent into mental illness probably began there.

His other son sadly has ups and downs, and finally downs. He refuses to take his medicine and ultimately can't win the battle against his injured brain. And that's the tragedy - that Powers and his wife had to deal with this in the first place - he shouldn't have been at home, he should have been in a place where he could get full-time care. But those places don't exist anymore - whether it's budget cuts, or "personal rights," our society views mental health care as somebody else's problem. In our current 2017 society, we even have less interest in science or medical care, or anything that doesn't supposedly save us two nickels in our precious taxes. Just like the anti-vaccination people are living in a world of magical thinking - that they know best in the face of science - so we've created a world where a brain disease makes the victim the bad guy, and that allows us to wash our hands of doing anything about it.

Powers sort of glosses over many of the problems with institutionalized care. He's right that states shut down their state-run hospitals, and created the problem of homeless, insane people. But those hospitals were badly run and often abusive. So in a perfect world, they'd be a good solution, but they aren't a perfect solution. But they're certainly better than the head-in-the-sand approach we seem to be using now.

Ultimately, the book made me angry in an impotent way. I don't see any changes on the horizon. I see the problems Powers describes getting worse not better. I see cops killing mentally ill people and continuing to cover it up - as Powers gives many examples of - or simply justifying it for likely fair reasons. But cops shouldn't be the front line to deal with deranged people - you don't call a cop when somebody has cancer.

So it's a five star book for scope and effort, certainly, but it's not five stars for the reading experience, and I don't think Powers wanted it to be.

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