



VINTAGE BOOKS ANCHOR BOOKS

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.
1745 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10019
TELEPHONE 413 268-0110 FAX 413 268-9996
jmarshall@randomhouse.com

JEN MARSHALL
PUBLICIST AT LARGE

FINALLY IN TRADE PAPERBACK—THE MEMOIR THAT HAS EVERYONE FROM OPRAH TO OLIVER SACKS SINGING ITS PRAISE.

September 2009

Dear Editor/Producer,

Enclosed is an unforgettable, important memoir of a family's brush with mental illness that all of us at Vintage Books are proud and excited to be publishing in trade paperback this fall, **HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE**, by Michael Greenberg (Vintage Books, September 8, 2009). It's a father's story about the year his fifteen-year-old daughter went mad. **Oprah loves this book, TIME magazine named it a top ten book of the year, and Amazon.com chose it as their # 2 overall best book of the year and their # 1 best non-fiction book of the year.** Reviews coast to coast echoed these praises—truly, if you haven't read **HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE** yet, I urge you to. It's one of the rare books that will reward every reader with the sheer power of its narrative.

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE offers a deeply personal look at what happens to an entire family when a child is mentally ill. Greenberg wrote this book because he felt there was a gap in the literature of madness that needed to be closed. The majority of the brilliant memoirs on madness out there are written by the person who is mentally ill—think *The Bell Jar*, *Girl Interrupted*, *Darkness Visible* etc. Greenberg wanted to give voice from the other shore—that of the grieving, angry, desperate, loving parent who wants to save his child from the monster of mental illness.

As you plan fall features, please keep Michael Greenberg and his extraordinary memoir in mind. He asks and answers a universal question—how does one go on in the face of sudden, almost unbearable change and loss?

With very best wishes,

Jen Marshall
Publicist at Large
Vintage Books and Anchor Books
413-268-0110 / jmarshall@randomhouse.com

NATIONAL TOUR DATES

for

MICHAEL GREENBERG

author of

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE

A FATHER'S STORY OF LOVE AND MADNESS

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21

LONG ISLAND, NY

Molloy College

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5

NEW CANAAN, CT

New Canaan Public Library

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6

FAIRFIELD, CT

Fairfield Public Library

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7

NEW YORK, NY

The Tenement Museum

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16

MANCHESTER, VT

Northshire Bookstore

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28

DANBURY, CT

One Book, One City

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

AUSTIN, TX

Texas Book Festival

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

JCC Book Festival

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3

MEQUON, WI

Next Chapter Bookshop

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

CHICAGO, IL

Barbara's Bookstore

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Magers and Quinn

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

PHILADELPHIA, PA

First Person Arts Festival

SAT–SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 14–15

MIAMI, FL

Miami Book Fair

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

CAMBRIDGE, MA

Porter Square Books

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A native New Yorker, Michael Greenberg is a columnist for *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), where his wide-ranging essays have been appearing since 2003. His fiction, criticism, and travel pieces have been published in such varied places as *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *Bomb*, *The Village Voice*, and *The New York Review of Books*. He lives in New York with his wife and son.



© Marion Ertlinger

To schedule an interview with the author or for more information:
Jen Marshall / jmarshall@randomhouse.com / 413-268-0110

Talk to MICHAEL GREENBERG
author of
HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE
about:

- **Parenting a teen who experiences a sudden onset of severe mental illness:**

How does a parent deal with what amounts to an atomic bomb dropped out of the blue on the doorstep?

- **Making art about a child in a difficult and private situation:**

The reviews of HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE were stellar but what did writing and publishing this book do to your relationship with your daughter? Does she like the book? How do your sons feel about it? How did you decide to write it? Sally was and still is extremely gifted with words. Why didn't she write this book herself? Would you advise other parents in similar situations to take up the pen, camera, or paintbrush?

- **What it is like to have to commit your child to a psychiatric institute:**

Does your child hate you forever? Do you hate yourself? Does it work?

- **The blame game:**

What happens to your "parenting confidence factor" when your child is diagnosed with a mental illness? What other subgroups of parents experience this phenomena and what tips do you have for dealing with it?

- **Health care costs:**

How do you get necessary care for your child when you don't have adequate health insurance? Let's face it: unless the current administration really does achieve drastic health care reform, the majority of even well-insured parents cannot afford the standard of care that doctors would recommend for a mentally ill child if money were no object.

- **The victims of childhood mental illness that nobody talks about—the parents, siblings, and grandparents of the sick individual:**

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE is eloquent and detailed on this topic. What's the take-away?

- **The long-term effects of Sally's mental illness on the family as a whole:**

Many are surprising—and wonderful.

- **What Sally is doing now, thirteen years after her diagnosis with bipolar disease.**



To schedule an interview with the author or for more information:
Jen Marshall / jmarshall@randomhouse.com / 413-268-0110



News from

VINTAGE

A DIVISION OF RANDOM HOUSE, INC.

Contact: Jen Marshall

Tel: 413-268-0110

jmarshall@randomhouse.com

**A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR
TIME MAGAZINE
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
AMAZON'S #1 NONFICTION BOOK OF THE YEAR
IN TRADE PAPERBACK SEPTEMBER 8**

“Lucid, realistic, compassionate and illuminating . . . In its detail, depth, richness and sheer intelligence, HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE will be recognized as a classic of its kind.”

—OLIVER SACKS, *The New York Review of Books*

“There is a dancing, dazzling siren seductress at the heart of this book and . . . [it is] madness itself. . . . The startling associative imagery that gives Greenberg’s writing its power is like a domesticated version of the madness that nearly carried away his daughter’s life.”

—*Time*

“What sets HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE apart . . . is Greenberg’s frank pessimism, dark humor and fundamental incapacity to make sense of his daughter’s ordeal, let alone derive an uplifting moral from it. . . . With little fanfare or commentary, he lays bare tangled family dynamics in all their raw power.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE

A FATHER’S STORY OF LOVE AND MADNESS

MICHAEL GREENBERG



“HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE is about tenacity and tenderness, feeling helpless but being present, about cracking up, then finding the wherewithal to glue the jagged pieces of your mind back together again. But mostly it’s about love.”

—OPRAH WINFREY, in her letter to her readers in *O, The Oprah Magazine*

CONTINUED ON REVERSE

To schedule an interview with the author or for more information:
Jen Marshall / jmarshall@randomhouse.com / 413-268-0110

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE • Michael Greenberg • A Vintage Books Trade Paperback • \$14.95 • 256 pp. • September 8, 2009 • ISBN: 978-0-307-47354-7

VINTAGE BOOKS • A Division of Random House, Inc. • 1745 Broadway • New York, NY 10019

www.vintagebooks.com

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE *by* MICHAEL GREENBERG

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE tells the story of the extraordinary summer when, at the age of fifteen, Michael Greenberg's daughter was struck mad. It begins with Sally's sudden visionary crack-up on the streets of Greenwich Village, and continues, among other places, in the out-of-time world of a Manhattan psychiatric ward during the city's most sweltering months. "I feel like I'm traveling and traveling with nowhere to go back to," Sally says in a burst of lucidity while hurtling away toward some place her father could not dream of or imagine. HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE is the chronicle of that journey, and its effect on Sally and those closest to her—her mother and stepmother, her brother and grandmother, and, not least of all, the author himself.

Among Greenberg's unforgettable gallery of characters are an unconventional psychiatrist, an Orthodox Jewish patient, a manic Classics professor, a movie producer, and a landlord with literary aspirations. Unsentimental, nuanced, and deeply humane, HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE holds the reader in a mesmerizing state of suspension between the mundane and the transcendent.

And coming this fall:

BEG, BORROW, STEAL: A Writer's Life by Michael Greenberg • Other Press • \$22.00 • ON SALE: September 8, 2009

For more information:

Terrie Akers / Publicity Manager, Other Press / 212-414-0054 ext. 205 / terrie@otherpress.com

Gretchen Koss / President, Tandem Literary / 212-629-1990 / gretchen@tandemliterary.com

Praise for HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE

"[A] finely observed memoir. . . . written in delicately episodic style. Vivid."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"In this powerful memoir, writer Michael Greenberg describes the terrifying summer his 15-year-old daughter, Sally, became a stranger to herself and to her father. In August 1996, the lively teenager became, almost overnight, manic and uncontrollable, unable to stop talking as words poured out. With spare, unemotional prose, Greenberg captures what it's like to have a mentally ill child and the way the disease strips him of his sense of control over his daughter's health."

—*USA Today*

"This memoir of a family crisis captures the grief that transformed their lives. . . . Readers come away with a sense of the intractable nature of psychosis and the courage it requires for patients like Sally, whose struggles continue, merely to live."

—*People*

"Triumphant. . . . Greenberg renders the details of his daughter's breakdown with lyrical precision."

—*The Washington Post*

"A thoughtful and heartfelt tale."

—*Entertainment Weekly*

"HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE is artful, well-observed and brutally clear about the impact of bipolar disease on everyone it touches."

—*Chicago Tribune*

"[HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE's] fundamental strength arises from Greenberg's insistence on facing the demons that held his girl in their dark thrall. Sally's descent and tentative return form the map for this story; Greenberg's courage lies in his willingness to follow her down that terrible path, no matter where it leads."

—*Bookforum*

"Greenberg sought to fill in something 'missing in the literature of madness'—namely, its effect on those closest to the sufferer. HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE does this and much more, balancing a clear-eyed understanding of an easily diagnosed, chronic disease . . . with respect for its more mysterious manifestations."

—*New York magazine*

"Greenberg writes with an emotional clarity that combines compassion for his daughter with a stark, almost pessimistic honesty."

—*Star Tribune (Minneapolis)*

"Greenberg deftly show that sometimes the ones who bear the 'stigma' of a diagnosis can possess potent distillations of truth, while others who move about in the 'real world' seem to have only a marginal grasp on reality."

—*The Seattle Times*

"Greenberg writes with precision and depth of almost unfathomable problems. . . . HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE is emotionally honest and has an ability to dispense hope that a fictionalized account would not."

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

**To schedule an interview with the author or for more information:
Jen Marshall / jmarshall@randomhouse.com / 413-268-0110**

September 28, 2008

A Fire in Her Brain

By RACHEL DONADIO

Few things in life are sadder or more frightening than watching a loved one transported far away, swiftly and irrevocably, by illness. In the summer of 1996, Michael Greenberg's vivacious 15-year-old daughter, Sally, was gripped by a psychotic episode from which she and her family are still recovering. "I feel like I'm traveling and traveling with nowhere to go back to," a troubled Sally says in the opening passage of "Hurry Down Sunshine," Greenberg's remarkable account of his attempts to reckon with his daughter's manic depression — or madness, as he prefers to call it. Sally's transformation is sudden and devastating. "She had learned to speak from me; she had heard her first stories from me," Greenberg writes. "And yet from one day to the next we had become strangers."

HURRY DOWN SUNSHINE

By Michael Greenberg

234 pp. Other Press. \$22

Sally enters a feverish mental state, writing and pacing and talking and arguing and pushing. Greenberg and his wife, Pat, take her to the hospital, where she is placed in the "Quiet Room," a shoebox space whose erasable board says: "Sally Greenberg. No Privileges. No Visitors. Level Zero." Her comrades on the ward include Noah, a young Hasidic Jew whose family believes his fervent and manic praying shows he has achieved devaykah, or communion with God. Sometimes, the spare dialogue has echoes of Beckett: "I don't know who I am," Sally tells Pat, her stepmother, while at Bellevue. Pat responds, "Did you ever know?" Sally shakes her head, No. "Then nothing's changed," Pat says.

There are endless visits to doctors, and many medications. Greenberg's points of reference are more literary than medical. "On chlorpromazine, the poet Robert Lowell was unable to build a three-letter word on a Scrabble board or follow the count of balls and strikes in a televised baseball game," he writes. "Sally would experience a similar intellectual paralysis."

But she needed slowing down: patients with Sally's illness have been known to drop dead from manic exhaustion. In one harrowing scene, Greenberg swallows some of her antipsychotic medication to try to understand the fog enveloping her. "I feel dizzy and far away, as if I am about to fall from a great height but my feet are nailed to the edge of the precipice," he writes. He understands how Sally says she has been "packed in foam rubber." In an effort to rouse himself, he stabs his hand with a fork.

At times, Greenberg is consumed by anger and frustration; at one point, he even strikes Pat. Occasionally, the outside world creeps in. It's the summer of 1996. TWA Flight 800 explodes over Long Island. Greenberg finds himself oddly drawn to the Republican presidential candidate, Bob Dole, "with his lame arm and his noble effort to conceal it, his pinched expression of perpetually suppressed pain," while Bill Clinton's "unrelenting sunniness fills me with unease." Eventually, Sally emerges from her fog and returns to start the new school year — only to succumb to psychosis again years later.

Greenberg often invokes James Joyce, who blamed himself for his daughter Lucia's mental illness and feared that his work on "Finnegans Wake," a novel of hermetic wordplay, had somehow precipitated her collapse. "Whatever spark of gift I possess," Joyce said, "has been transmitted to her and has kindled a fire in her brain." Like Joyce, Greenberg has a deep writerly connection to his daughter. After she recovers from her first bout, she tells him: "I really believed my vision would crush you, Dad, because you, more than anyone, were toiling to get your genius back, but you couldn't, you were trying too hard." She describes her psychosis as an ability to "see underneath the surface of things . . . see inside people."

After Sally's first, tenuous recovery, her mother, Robin, confesses she still hasn't given up the idea that Sally is "in touch with a higher force." Greenberg responds, "I wish she'd get back in touch with the lower one." And Robin says, "It wouldn't kill you to think positively for once in a blue moon." But Greenberg's refusal — or inability — to think positively, or reductively, is one of his best qualities. What sets "Hurry Down Sunshine" apart from the great horde of mediocre memoirs, with their sitcom emotions and too neatly resolved fights and reconciliations, is Greenberg's frank pessimism, dark humor and fundamental incapacity to make sense of his daughter's ordeal, let alone to derive an uplifting moral from it.

Beyond grappling with Sally's illness, Greenberg also probes his family history. With little fanfare or commentary, he lays bare tangled family dynamics in all their raw power. When Greenberg and Pat eventually decide to have a child together, Sally tells Pat matter-of-factly: "You'll never love me as much as your own baby. It's the biological law." Sibling rivalries stretch back generations. Greenberg's father ran a scrap metal business in Brooklyn and never understood his son's literary interests. Greenberg, one of five brothers, was especially close with his mother. When his brothers grew jealous, the young Greenberg willfully drifted away from her, a rift that began to heal only with Sally's illness. Over drinks in a bar near Bellevue, his mother tells him how much she resented the birth of one of her sons, Steve, and how she blames herself for his emotional disturbances.

Indeed, one source of the book's Russian-novel drama — and humor — lies in Greenberg's exchanges with Steve, who is often paranoid and has become prone to violent outbursts since the death of their father two years earlier. Steve thinks people are out to get him, and sometimes they are — or at least out to evict him. Steve lives in a studio apartment in a now gentrified building, resented and feared by his neighbors. Each week, Greenberg takes his brother to buy his groceries, including 100 bags of Lipton tea; Steve steeps five at a time in an old pickle jar and drinks sitting in a rotting Barcalounger.

But beyond family drama, "Hurry Down Sunshine" is a very New York book, filled with the kind of characters increasingly rare in a city where real kooks can no longer afford to live. As the book opens, Greenberg, Pat and Sally live in a poorly maintained, top-floor tenement apartment on Bank Street that Greenberg, a freelance writer, rents from an aspiring author who offers low rent in exchange for help with the building and encouragement for the unpromising novel he has been "revising" for years. When Sally gets sick, Greenberg has no health insurance. "Whatever the bill comes to, I'll pay it; I give you my word," Greenberg tells the hospital administrator when Sally is committed. "Apparently your word is all you can give me," she responds.

In the past few years, Greenberg has written about his brother Steve and many other matters in the "Freelance" column of The Times Literary Supplement, where he has established himself as a quirky New York Jewish voice in an unlikely venue. Even to seasoned Manhattanites, these dispatches are utterly fresh and unexpected, postcards from a boho New York where there are still artists, writers, strivers, wackos,

teachers — and rent control. There's no news peg, no amused detachment, no slick packaging or knowing irony; imagine *The Talk of the Town* as if written by Dostoyevsky.

In a recent column, Greenberg described his family's response to "Hurry Down Sunshine." Steve didn't want anything to do with it, while Robin "praised the book in a strained, dutiful voice that concealed her objections." Much to Greenberg's relief, Sally, who now lives near her mother in Vermont, gave him her blessing, with some caveats. "You weren't fair to Mom," she tells him. "You made her out to be some kind of New Age flake." But on the whole she is pleased. "I felt I was reading about someone else, a 15-year-old girl named Sally who had been to hell and was the only one who didn't know it," she says. "How many people get to look at themselves in such a way?"

Rachel Donadio, a former writer and editor at the Book Review, is the Rome bureau chief for The Times.

Copyright 2008 The New York Times Company

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

The New York Review of Books

VOLUME 55, NUMBER 14 · SEPTEMBER 25, 2008

A Summer of Madness

By Oliver Sacks

Hurry Down Sunshine

by Michael Greenberg

Other Press, 234 pp., \$22.00

OTHER BOOKS MENTIONED IN THIS REVIEW

Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Philosophy of a Lunatic

by John Cusance

Pellegrini and Cudahy, 254 pp. (1952)

Manic-Depressive Illness: Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression

by Frederick K. Goodwin and Kay Redfield Jamison

Oxford University Press, second edition, 1,288 pp., \$110.00

An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness

by Kay Redfield Jamison

Vintage, 224 pp., \$13.95 (paper)

Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament

by Kay Redfield Jamison

Free Press, 384 pp., \$15.00 (paper)

The Seduction of Madness: Revolutionary Insights into the World of Psychosis and a Compassionate Approach to Recovery at Home

by Edward M. Podvoll

HarperCollins, 342 pp. (1990)

Lectures on Clinical Psychiatry

by Emil Kraepelin

William Wood, 308 pp. (1904)

Manic-Depressive Insanity and Paranoia

by Emil Kraepelin

Edinburgh: Livingstone, 280 pp. (1921)

"On July 5, 1996," Michael Greenberg starts, "my daughter was struck mad." No time is wasted on preliminaries, and *Hurry Down Sunshine* moves swiftly, almost torrentially, from this opening sentence, in tandem with the events that it tells of. The onset of mania is sudden and explosive: Sally, the fifteen-year-old daughter, has been in a heightened state for some weeks, listening to Glenn Gould's Goldberg Variations on her Walkman, poring over a volume of Shakespeare's sonnets till the early hours. Greenberg writes:

Flipping open the book at random I find a blinding crisscross of arrows, definitions, circled words. Sonnet 13 looks like a page from the Talmud, the margins crowded with so much commentary the original text is little more than a speck at the center.

Sally has also been writing singular, Sylvia Plath-like poems. Her father surreptitiously glances at these, finds them strange, but it does not occur to him that her mood or activity is in any way pathological. She has had learning difficulties from an early age, but she is now triumphing over these, finding her intellectual powers for the first time. Such exaltation is normal in a highly gifted fifteen-year-old. Or so it seems.

But, on that hot July day, she breaks—haranguing strangers in the street, demanding their attention, shaking them, and then suddenly running full tilt into a stream of traffic, convinced she can bring it to a halt by sheer willpower (with quick reflexes, a friend yanks her out of the way just in time).

Robert Lowell described something very similar in an attack of "pathological enthusiasm":

The night before I was locked up I ran about the streets of Bloomington Indiana.... I believed I could stop cars and paralyze their forces by merely standing in the middle of the highway with my arms outspread.

Such sudden, dangerous exaltations and actions are not uncommon at the start of a manic attack.

Lowell had a vision of Evil in the world, and of himself, in his "enthusiasm," as the Holy Ghost. Sally had, in some ways, an analogous vision of moral collapse, seeing all around her the loss or suppression of God-given "genius," and of her own mission to help everyone reclaim that lost birthright. That it was such a vision which led to her passionate confrontation with strangers, her bizarre behavior imbued with a sense of her own special powers, her parents learn when they quiz her the next day:

She has had a vision. It came to her a few days ago, in the Bleecker Street playground, while she was watching two little girls play on the wooden footbridge near the slide. In a surge of insight she saw their genius, their limitless native little-girl genius, and simultaneously realized that we are all geniuses, that the very idea the word stands for has been distorted. Genius is not the fluke they want us to believe it is, no, it's as basic to who we are as our sense of love, of God. Genius is childhood. The Creator gives it to us with life, and society drums it out of us before we have the chance to follow the impulses of our naturally creative souls....

Sally related her vision to the little girls in the playground. Apparently they understood her perfectly. Then she walked out onto Bleecker Street and discovered her life had changed. The flowers in front of the Korean deli in their green plastic vases, the magazine covers in the news shop window, the buildings, cars—all took on a sharpness beyond anything she had imagined. The sharpness, she said, "of present time." A wavelet of energy swelled through the center of her being. She could see the hidden life in things, their detailed brilliance, the funneled genius that went into making them what they are.

Sharpest of all was the misery on the faces of the people she passed. She tried to explain her vision to them but they just kept rushing by. Then it hit her: they already know about their genius, it isn't a secret, but much worse: genius has been suppressed in them, as it had been suppressed in her. And the enormous effort required to keep it from percolating to the surface and reasserting its glorious hold on our lives is the cause of all human suffering. Suffering that Sally, with this epiphany, has been chosen among all people to cure.

As startling as Sally's passionate new beliefs are, her father and stepmother are even more struck by her manner of speaking:

Pat and I are dumbstruck, less by what she is saying than how she is saying it. No sooner does one thought come galloping out of her mouth than another overtakes it, producing a pile-up of words without sequence, each sentence canceling out the previous one before it's had a chance to emerge. Our pulses racing, we strain to absorb the sheer volume of energy pouring from her

tiny body. She jabs at the air, thrusts out her chin...her drive to communicate is so powerful it's tormenting her. Each individual word is like a toxin she must expel from her body.

The longer she speaks, the more incoherent she becomes, and the more incoherent she becomes, the more urgent is her need to make us understand her! I feel helpless watching her. And yet I am galvanized by her sheer aliveness.

One may call it mania, madness, or psychosis—a chemical imbalance in the brain—but it presents itself as energy of a primordial sort. Greenberg likens it to "being in the presence of a rare force of nature, such as a great blizzard or flood: destructive, but in its way astounding too." Such unbridled energy can resemble that of creativity or inspiration or genius—this, indeed, is what Sally feels is rushing through her—not an illness, but the apotheosis of health, the release of a deep, previously suppressed self.

These are the paradoxes that surround what Hughlings Jackson, the nineteenth-century neurologist, called "super-positive" states: they betoken disorder, imbalance in the nervous system, but their energy, their euphoria, makes them feel like supreme health. Some patients may achieve a startled insight into this, as did one patient of mine, a very old lady with neurosyphilis. Becoming more and more vivacious in her early nineties, she said to herself, "You're feeling too well, you must be ill." George Eliot, similarly, spoke of herself as feeling "dangerously well" before the onset of her migraine attacks.

Mania is a biological condition that feels like a psychological one—a state of mind. In this way it resembles the effects of various intoxications. I saw this very dramatically with some of my *Awakenings* patients when they began taking L-dopa, a drug which is converted in the brain to the neuro-transmitter dopamine. Leonard L., in particular, became quite manic on this: "With L-dopa in my blood," he wrote at the time, "there's nothing in the world I can't do if I want." He called dopamine "resurrectamine" and started to see himself as a messiah—he felt that the world was polluted with sin and that he had been called upon to save it. And in nineteen nonstop, almost sleepless days and nights, he typed an entire autobiography of 50,000 words. "Is it the medicine I am taking," wrote another patient, "or just my new state of mind?"

If there is uncertainty in a patient's mind about what is "physical" and what is "mental," there may be a still deeper uncertainty as to what is self or not-self—as with my patient Frances D., who, as she grew more excited on L-dopa, was taken over by strange passions and images which she could not dismiss as entirely alien to her "real self." Did they, she wondered, come from very deep but previously suppressed parts of herself? But these patients, unlike Sally, knew that they were on a drug, and could see, all around them, similar effects taking hold on the others.

For Sally there was no precedent, no guide. Her parents were as bewildered as she was—more so, because they did not have her mad assurance. Was it, they wondered, something she had been taking—had she dropped acid, or something worse? And if not, was it something that they had bequeathed her in their genes, or something awful they had "done" at a critical stage in her development? Was it something she had always had in her, even though it was triggered so suddenly?

These were the questions my own parents asked themselves when, in 1943, my fifteen-year-old brother Michael became acutely psychotic. My brother saw "messages" everywhere, felt his thoughts were being read or broadcast, had explosions of strange giggling, and felt he had been translocated to another "realm." Hallucinatory drugs were rare in the 1940s, so my parents, who were both doctors, wondered whether Michael might have some psychosis-producing illness—perhaps a thyroid condition or a brain tumor. It ultimately became clear, though, that my brother suffered from a schizophrenic psychosis. In Sally's case, blood tests and physical exams ruled out any problems with thyroid levels, intoxicants, or tumors. Her psychosis, though acute and dangerous (all psychoses are potentially dangerous, at least to the patient), was "merely" manic.

One can become manic—or depressed—without becoming psychotic: having delusions or hallucinations,

losing sight of reality. Sally, though, did go over the top, and on that hot July day, something happened, something snapped. All of a sudden, she was a different person—she looked different, sounded different. "Suddenly every point of connection between us had vanished," her father writes. She calls him "Father" (he was "Dad" before), and speaks in a "pressured, phony voice, as if delivering stage lines she has learned"; "her normally warm chestnut eyes are shell-like and dark, as if they've been brushed over with lacquer."

Greenberg tries to speak to her of ordinary matters, asking her if she is hungry or wants to lie down:

Each time, however, her otherness is reaffirmed. It is as if the real Sally has been kidnapped, and here in her place is a demon, like Solomon's, who has appropriated her body. The ancient superstition of possession! How else to come to grips with this grotesque transformation?

...In the most profound sense Sally and I are strangers: we have no common language.

The special qualities of mania have been recognized and distinguished from other forms of madness since the great physicians of antiquity wrote on the subject. Aretaeus, in the second century, gave a clear description of how excited and depressed states might alternate in an individual, but the distinction between different forms of madness was not formalized until the rise of psychiatry in nineteenth-century France. It was then that "circular insanity" (*folie circulaire* or *folie à double forme*)—what Emil Kraepelin later called manic-depressive insanity and what we would now call bipolar disorder—was distinguished from the much graver disorder of "dementia praecox" or schizophrenia. But medical accounts, accounts from the outside, can never do justice to what is actually experienced in the course of such psychoses; there is no substitute here for firsthand accounts.

There have been several such personal accounts over the years, and one of the best, to my mind, is *Wisdom, Madness and Folly: The Philosophy of a Lunatic* by John Custance, published in 1952. He writes:

The mental disease to which I am subject is...known as manic depression, or, more accurately, as Manic depressive Psychosis.... The manic state is one of elation, of pleasurable excitement sometimes attaining to an extreme pitch of ecstasy; the depressive state is its precise opposite, one of misery, dejection, and at times of appalling horror.

Custance had his first manic attack at the age of thirty-five, and would continue to have periodic episodes of mania or depression for the next twenty years:

When the nervous system is thoroughly deranged, the two contrasting states of mind can be almost infinitely intensified. It sometimes seems to me as though my condition had been specially devised by Providence to illustrate the Christian concepts of Heaven and Hell. Certainly it has shown me that within my own soul there are possibilities of an inner peace and happiness beyond description, as well as of inconceivable depths of terror and despair.

Normal life and consciousness of "reality" appear to me rather like motion along a narrow strip of table-land at the top of a Great Divide separating two distinct universes from each other. On the one hand the slope is green and fertile, leading to a lovely landscape where love, joy and the infinite beauties of nature and of dreams await the traveller; on the other a barren, rocky declivity, where lurk endless horrors of distorted imagination, descends to the bottomless pit.

In the condition of manic-depression, this table-land is so narrow that it is exceedingly difficult to keep on it. One begins to slip; the world about one changes imperceptibly. For a time it is possible to keep some sort of grip on reality. But once one is really over the edge, once the grip of reality is lost, the forces of the Unconscious take charge, and then begins what appears to be an unending voyage into the universe of bliss or the universe of horror as the

case may be, a voyage over which one has oneself no control whatever.

In our own time, Kay Redfield Jamison, a brilliant and courageous psychiatrist who has manic-depressive illness herself, has written both the definitive medical monograph on this subject (*Manic-Depressive Illness, with Frederick K. Goodwin, 1990; second edition, 2007*) and a personal memoir (*An Unquiet Mind, 1995*). In the latter, she writes:

I was a senior in high school when I had my first attack of manic-depressive illness; once the siege began, I lost my mind rather rapidly. At first, everything seemed so easy. I raced about like a crazed weasel, bubbling with plans and enthusiasms, immersed in sports, and staying up all night, night after night, out with friends, reading everything that wasn't nailed down, filling manuscript books with poems and fragments of plays, and making expansive, completely unrealistic, plans for my future. The world was filled with pleasure and promise; I felt great. Not just great, I felt *really* great. I felt I could do anything, that no task was too difficult. My mind seemed clear, fabulously focused, and able to make intuitive mathematical leaps that had up to that point entirely eluded me. Indeed, they elude me still.

At that time, however, not only did everything make perfect sense, but it all began to fit into a marvelous kind of cosmic relatedness. My sense of enchantment with the laws of the natural world caused me to fizz over, and I found myself buttonholing my friends to tell them how beautiful it all was. They were less than transfixed by my insights into the webbing and beauties of the universe, although considerably impressed by how exhausting it was to be around my enthusiastic ramblings.... Slow down, Kay.... For God's sake, Kay, slow down.

I did, finally, slow down. In fact, I came to a grinding halt.

Jamison contrasts this experience with the episodes that came later:

Unlike the very severe manic episodes that came a few years later and escalated wildly and psychotically out of control, this first sustained wave of mild mania was a light, lovely tincture of true mania.... It was short-lived and quickly burned itself out: tiresome to my friends, perhaps; exhausting and exhilarating to me, definitely; but not disturbingly over the top.

Both Jamison and Custance describe how mania alters not just thought and feeling, but even their sensory perceptions. Custance carefully itemizes these changes in his memoir. Sometimes the electric lights in the ward have "a bright starlike phenomenon emanat[ing]...ultimately forming a maze of iridescent patterns." Faces seem to "glow with a sort of inner light which shows up the characteristic lines extremely vividly." Though normally "a hopeless draughtsman," Custance is able to draw quite well while manic (I was reminded here of my own ability to do this, many years ago, during a period of amphetamine-induced hypomania); all of his senses seem intensified:

My fingers are much more sensitive and neat. Although generally a clumsy person with an execrable handwriting I can write much more neatly than usual; I can print, draw, embellish and carry out all sorts of little manual operations, such as pasting up scrapbooks and the like, which would normally drive me to distraction. I also note a particular tingling in my fingertips.

My hearing appears to be more sensitive, and I am able to take in...many different sound-impressions at the same time.... From the cries of gulls outside to the laughter and chatter of my fellow-patients, I am fully alive to what is going on and yet find no difficulty in concentrating on my work.

...If I were to be allowed to walk about freely in a flower garden I should appreciate the scents far more than usual.... Even common grass tastes excellent, while real delicacies like

strawberries or raspberries give ecstatic sensations appropriate to a veritable food of the gods.

At first, Sally's parents struggle to believe (as Sally herself believes) that her excited state is something positive, something other than illness. Her mother puts a somewhat New Agey spin on it:

Sally is having an experience, Michael, I'm sure of it, this isn't a sickness. She's a highly spiritual girl.... What's happening right now is a necessary phase in Sally's evolution, her journey toward a higher realm.

And this interpretation finds echoes of a more classical kind in Greenberg himself:

I wanted to believe this too,...to believe in her breakthrough, her victory, the delayed efflorescence of her mind. But how does one tell the difference between Plato's "divine madness" and gibberish? between [enthusiasm] and lunacy? between the prophet and the "medically mad"?

(It was similar, Greenberg points out, with James Joyce and his schizophrenic daughter, Lucia. "Her intuitions are amazing," Joyce remarked. "Whatever spark of gift I possess has been transmitted to her and has kindled a fire in her brain." Later, he told Beckett, "She's not a raving lunatic, just a poor child who tried to do too much, to understand too much.")

But it becomes clear within hours that Sally is indeed psychotic and out of control, and her parents take her to a psychiatric hospital. At first, she welcomes this, seeing the nurses, the attendants, and the psychiatrists as specially tuned to understand her insight, her message. The reality is brutally different: she is stupefied with tranquilizers and put in a locked ward.

Greenberg's description of the ward takes on the richness and density of a novel, embracing a Chekhovian cast of characters—the staff, the other patients on the ward. He sees a highly disturbed, obviously psychotic young Hasidic man, whose family will not accept that he is ill: "He has achieved *devaykah*," says his brother, "the state of constant communion with God."

There is relatively little attempt to *understand* Sally in the hospital—her mania is treated first of all as a medical condition, a disturbance of brain chemistry, to be dealt with on a neurochemical basis. Medication is crucial, even life-saving, in acute mania, which untreated can lead to exhaustion and death. Unfortunately, though, Sally does not respond to lithium, which has been invaluable for many patients with manic-depressive illness, and so her physicians have to resort to heavy tranquilizers—which damp down her exuberance and wildness but leave her stupefied and apathetic and parkinsonian for a time. Seeing his teenage daughter in this zombie-like state is almost as shocking for her father as her mania has been.

After twenty-four days of this, Sally is released—still somewhat delusional and still on strong tranquilizers—to go home, under careful and at first continuous surveillance. Outside the hospital, she establishes a crucial relationship with an exceptional therapist, who is able to approach Sally as a human being, trying to understand her thoughts and feelings. Dr. Lensing shows a disarming directness: "I bet you feel as if there's a lion inside you" are her first words to Sally.

"How did you know?" Sally is amazed, her suspicion instantly melting away. Lensing goes on to talk of mania, Sally's mania, as if it were a sort of creature, another being, inside her:

Lensing nimbly lowers herself into the waiting area chair next to Sally's and tells her in a tone of woman-to-woman straight talk that mania—and she refers to it as if it is a separate entity, a mutual acquaintance of theirs—mania is a glutton for attention. It craves thrills, action, it wants to keep thriving, it will do anything to live on. "Did you ever have a friend who's so exciting you want to be around her, but she leads you into disaster and in the end you wish

you never met? You know the sort of person I mean: the girl who wants to go faster, who always wants more. The girl who serves herself first and screw the rest.... I'm just giving an example of what mania is: a greedy, charismatic person who pretends to be your friend."

Lensing tries to get Sally to distinguish her psychosis from her true identity, to stand outside the psychosis and to see the complex, ambiguous relationship between it and her. (Psychosis is "not an identity," she says sharply.) She speaks of this to Sally's father, too—for his understanding is also necessary if Sally is to get better. She emphasizes the seductive power of psychosis:

Sally...doesn't want to be isolated, her impulse is outward, which I can tell you is extremely good news. Her desire is to be understood, and not only by us, she wants to understand herself as well. She's still attached to her mania, of course. She's remembering the intensity of her experience, and she's doing her damnedest to keep that intensity alive. She thinks that if she gives it up, she'll lose the great abilities she believes she's acquired. It's a terrible paradox really: the mind falls in love with psychosis. The evil seduction, I call it.

"Seduction" is the crucial word here (it is also the key word in the title of Edward Podvoll's marvelous book *The Seduction of Madness*, on the nature and treatment of mental illness). Why should psychosis, and mania in particular, be seductive? Freud spoke of all psychoses as narcissistic disorders: one becomes the most important person in the world, chosen for a unique role, whether it is to be a messiah, a redeemer of souls, or (as happens in depressive or paranoid psychoses) to be the focus of universal persecution and accusation, or derision and degradation.

But even short of such messianic feelings, mania can fill one with a sense of enormous pleasure, even ecstasy—and the sheer intensity of this may make it difficult to "give up." It is what prompts Custance, despite his knowledge of how dangerous such a course is, to avoid medication and hospitalization in one attack of mania, and instead embrace it, undertaking a risky and rather James Bond-like adventure in East Berlin. Perhaps a similar intensity of feeling is sought by drug addicts, especially those addicted to stimulants like cocaine or amphetamines; and here, too, a high is likely to be followed by a crash, just as a mania is usually followed by a depression—both, perhaps, due to the exhaustion caused by neurotransmitters like dopamine in the overstimulated reward systems in the brain.

Mania, though, is by no means all pleasure, as Greenberg continually observes. He speaks of Sally's "pitiless ball of fire," her "terrified grandiosity," of how anxious and fragile she is inside the "hollow exuberance" of her mania. When one ascends to the exorbitant heights of mania, one becomes very isolated from ordinary human relationships, human scale—even though this isolation may be covered over by a defensive imperiousness or grandiosity. This is why Lensing sees Sally's returning desire to make genuine contact with others, to understand and be understood, as a propitious sign of her returning to health, her coming back to earth.

Psychosis, as Lensing says, is not an identity, but a temporary aberration or departure from identity. And yet having a chronic or recurring mind-altering condition like manic-depressive illness is bound to influence one's identity, to become part of one's attitudes and ways of thinking. As Jamison writes,

It is, after all, not just an illness, but something that affects every aspect of my life: my moods, my temperament, my work, and my reactions to almost everything that comes my way.

Nor is it just a piece of biological bad luck for which there is nothing to be said. Although Jamison says there is nothing good to be said for depression, she does feel that her manias and hypomanias, when not too out of control, have played a crucial and sometimes positive part in her life. Indeed, in her book *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993), she has provided much evidence to suggest a possible relationship between mania and creativity, citing the many great artists—Schumann, Coleridge, Byron, and Van Gogh among them—who seem to have lived with manic-depressive illness.

When Sally is hospitalized, her father asks the psychiatric resident about her diagnosis. "Sally's condition," the resident says, "has probably been building for a while, gathering strength until it just overwhelmed her." Greenberg asks what her "condition" is:

What we call [it] is not what's important right now. Certainly many of the criteria for bipolar I are here. But fifteen is relatively early for fulminating mania to present itself.

In the last couple of decades, the term "bipolar disorder" has come into use, in part, Jamison suggests, because it is felt to be less stigmatizing than "manic-depressive illness." But, she cautions,

Splitting mood disorders into bipolar and unipolar categories presupposes a distinction between depression and manic-depressive illness...that is not always clear, nor supported by science. Likewise, it perpetuates the notion that depression exists rather tidily segregated on its own pole, while mania clusters off neatly and discreetly on another. This polarization...flies in the face of everything that we know about the cauldronous, fluctuating nature of manic-depressive illness.

Moreover, "bipolarity" is characteristic of many disorders of control—like catatonia or parkinsonism—where patients lose the middle ground of normality and alternate between hyperkinetic and akinetic states. Even in a metabolic disease such as diabetes, there may be dramatic alternations between (for instance) very high blood sugar and very low blood sugar, as the complex homeostatic mechanisms are compromised.

There is another reason why the notion of manic-depressive illness as a bipolar illness, swinging from one pole to the other, can be misleading. This was brought out by Kraepelin more than a century ago, when he wrote of "mixed states," states in which there are elements of both mania and depression, inseparably intertwined. He wrote of "the deep inward relationship of such apparently contradictory states."

We speak of "poles apart," but the poles of mania and depression are so close to each other that one wonders if depression may be a form of mania, or vice versa. (Such a dynamic notion of mania and depression—their "clinical unity," as Kraepelin put it—is underlined by the fact that lithium, for those patients in whom it works, works equally well on *both* states.) This paradoxical situation is described by Greenberg with often astonishing oxymorons, as when he speaks of the "abysmal elation" Sally sometimes feels "in the throes of [her] dystopic mania."

Sally's final return from the mad heights of her mania is almost as sudden as her taking off into it seven weeks earlier, as Greenberg recounts:

Sally and I are standing in the kitchen. I have spent the day at home with her, working on my script for Jean-Paul.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" I ask.

"That would be nice. Yes. Thank you."

"With milk?"

"Please. And honey."

"Two spoonfuls?"

"Right. I'll put the honey in. I like watching it drip off the spoon."

Something about her tone has caught my attention: the modulation of her voice, its unpressured directness—measured, and with a warmth I have not heard in her in months. Her eyes have softened. I caution myself not to be fooled. Yet the change in her is unmistakable.

...It's as if a miracle has occurred. The miracle of normalcy, of ordinary existence....

It feels as if we have been living all summer inside a fable. A beautiful girl is turned into a comatose stone or a demon. She is separated from her loved ones, from language, from everything that had been hers to master. Then the spell is broken and she is awake again....

After her summer of madness, Sally is able to return to school—anxious, but determined to reclaim her life. At first, she keeps her illness to herself, and enjoys the company of three close friends from her class. "Often," her father writes, "I listen to her on the phone with them, intimate, biting, gossipy—the buoyant sound of health." A few weeks into the school year, after much discussion with her parents, Sally tells her friends about her psychosis:

They readily accept the news. Being an alumna of the psych ward confers social status on Sally. It's a kind of credential. She has been where they have not been. It becomes their secret.

Sally's madness resolves, and this, one might hope, would be the end of the story. But the very defining feature of manic-depressive illness is its cyclical nature, and in a postscript to his book, Greenberg indicates that Sally did have two further attacks: four years later, when she was in college, and six years after that (when her medication was discontinued). There is no "cure" for manic-depressive illness, but living with manic-depressive illness may be greatly helped by medication, by insight and understanding (in particular, by minimizing stressors like sleep loss, and being alert to the earliest signs of mania or depression), and, not least, by counseling and psychotherapy.

In its detail, depth, richness, and sheer intelligence, *Hurry Down Sunshine* will be recognized as a classic of its kind, along with the memoirs of Kay Redfield Jamison and John Custance. But what makes it unique is the fact that so much here is seen through the eyes of an extraordinarily open and sensitive parent—a father who, while never descending into sentimentality, has remarkable insight into his daughter's thoughts and feelings, and a rare power to find images or metaphors for almost unimaginable states of mind.

The question of "telling," of publishing detailed accounts of patients' lives, their vulnerabilities, their illness, is a matter of great moral delicacy, fraught with pitfalls and perils of every sort. Is Sally's struggle with psychosis not a private and personal matter, no one's business but her own (and that of her family and physicians)? Why would her father consider exposing his daughter's travails, and his family's pain, to the world? And how would Sally feel about a public disclosure of her teenage torments and exaltations?

This was not a quick or easy decision for either Sally or her father. Greenberg did not grab a pen and start writing during his daughter's psychosis in 1996—he waited, he pondered, he let the experience sink deep into him. He had long, searching discussions with Sally, and only more than a decade later did he feel that he might have the balance, the perspective, the tone that *Hurry Down Sunshine* would need. Sally, too, had come to feel this, and urged him not only to write her story, but to use her real name, without camouflage. It was a courageous decision, given the stigma and misunderstanding that still surround mental illness of any kind.

It is a stigma that affects many, for manic-depressive illness occurs in all cultures, and affects at least one person in a hundred—there are, at any time, millions of people, some even younger than Sally, who may have to face what she did. Lucid, realistic, compassionate, illuminating, *Hurry Down Sunshine* may provide a sort of guide for those who have to negotiate the dark regions of the soul—a guide, too, for their families and friends, for all those who want to understand what their loved ones are going through. Perhaps, too, it will remind us of what a narrow ridge of normality we all inhabit, with the abysses of mania and depression yawning to either side.

Letters

November 6, 2008: Arnold Wolfson, [Oliver Sacks in Orbit](#)

October 23, 2008: Kay Redfield Jamison, [Not a Psychiatrist](#)

Copyright © 1963-2009, NYREV, Inc. All rights reserved. Nothing in this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the publisher.



Thursday, Sep. 18, 2008

Brief Lives

By Lev Grossman

The mid-1960s to the mid-1970s were the heyday of the crazy-girl book: books by and about young women who lost their minds. Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Joanne Greenberg's haunting *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, *Go Ask Alice*, *Sybil*. There were books about crazy boys too, of course, such as Mark Vonnegut's *The Eden Express*. But that's just boys. Everybody knows they're crazy. There was something disturbingly, voyeuristically hypnotic about those hippie Ophelias--electrode paste on their temples beneath their center-parted hair, Jefferson Airplane on the sound track, psychedelic chaos in their brains.

The genre they founded has lived on, and each decade has given it a different period savor. The 1990s produced slacker crack-ups like *Girl, Interrupted* and *Prozac Nation*. Now, in the 2000s, we have *Hurry Down Sunshine* (Other Press; 234 pages), Michael Greenberg's account of his daughter Sally's psychotic break, which she experienced at the tragically precocious age of 15.

Sally had always been odd. She dressed eccentrically. She stayed up till all hours reading Shakespeare and scribbling in notebooks. But on July 5, 1996, something in her mental chemistry passed a tipping point. She started accosting strangers on the street. She frightened her friends. She was certain she was on the verge of titanic revelations that she had a duty to share with the world. Her sentences became tangled strings of self-devouring wordplay. "People get up-set when they feel set up," she told Greenberg. "Do you feel set up, Father?"

Greenberg took her to an emergency room, and with inexorable swiftness Sally was ingested by the medical world pronounced psychotic and committed to a locked ward. Greenberg joined the ranks of huddled pilgrims who line up every day for visiting hours. (One morning he took artichokes to Sally. "Art makes you choke, Father," she said. "You should give it up. It's a false god who causes you nothing but pain.") As Sally's life fell apart from the inside out, Greenberg's began collapsing from the outside in. He fought with his wife, Sally's stepmother. He drank. As a freelance writer, he had no health insurance; the first bill for Sally's meds came to \$724.

There is a dancing, dazzling siren seductress at the heart of this book and of all books like it, and it is not Sally (or *Sybil* or *Sylvia*) but madness itself. When Sally turns manic, it's as if some interstellar alien god is speaking through her, and you hang on to its every word. As a person, you want her to get better, but as a reader, you can't get enough of the crazy. ("Mania is a glutton for attention," says Dr. Lensing, Sally's gifted therapist. "It craves thrills, action, it wants to keep thriving, it will do anything to live on.") It's the old Romantic lie of mania, that it represents a heightened version of the self, a genius too great to be comprehensible. But the siren is a monster, and its song is just an endless chain of meaningless epiphanies and empty fireworks.


Copyright © 2009 Time Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.

The terrible irony of *Hurry Down Sunshine* is that you can hear in Greenberg's beautiful figurative language the not-so-distant echo of Sally's manic speech. They're both full of surprise metaphorical connections ("her eyes turn to polished coal") and abrupt right-angle turns. His literary talent is not unrelated to her curse: the startling associative imagery that gives his writing its power is like a domesticated version of the madness that nearly carried away his daughter's life.

Greenberg's daughter lost her mind. Elizabeth McCracken's son never had time to find his. He died in her womb when she was nine months pregnant. There can be few grimmer topics for a book than a stillborn baby, but I'll say this for McCracken's memoir, the unwieldily titled *An Exact Replica of a Figment of My Imagination* (Little, Brown; 192 pages): it's the funniest book about a dead baby that you will ever read.

McCracken is a novelist (*The Giant's House*), and *Figment* is the story of her pregnancy, her grieving and finally the birth of her second child, a baby boy, a year later. It is, as McCracken writes, "a story so grim and lessonless it's better not to think about at all." But reading it is a mysteriously enlarging experience. It could pair neatly with Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*: it's hard to imagine two more rigorous, unsentimental guides to enduring the very bottom of the scale of human emotion.

At the extreme depths that McCracken plumbs, language itself breaks down. "Was I a mother?" she asks herself, and after the baby's death but before its birth, "Was I pregnant? There should be a different word for it, for someone who hasn't yet delivered a dead child." But McCracken's sense of humor doesn't fail; it merely turns an inky black. An intern assigned to check her cervix "rummaged around in the manner of an unhappy wife looking for a wedding ring in a garbage disposal." When McCracken and her husband leave the hospital after the disaster, a black cat crosses her path. "You're too late, mate," her husband says.

 Click to Print

Find this article at:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1842298,00.html>

33 of 105 DOCUMENTS

Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News

February 8, 2009 Sunday

Diabolical Diabolical: With "Hurry Down Sunshine," Michael Greenberg tells the wrenching story of his young daughter's sudden, seemingly inexplicable mental breakdown.

BYLINE: Kristin Tillotson, Star Tribune, Minneapolis

SECTION: ENTERTAINMENT NEWS

LENGTH: 1363 words

Feb. 8--NEW YORK -- James Joyce once took his beloved, mentally ill daughter Lucia to see Carl Jung. The famed psychoanalyst compared father and child to two people going to the bottom of a river -- one falling, the other diving.

Michael Greenberg is as close to knowing how Joyce felt as anyone. In July 1996, he watched helplessly as his bright, creative daughter snapped. Overnight, it seemed, 15-year-old Sally went from reading Shakespeare sonnets in their West Village apartment to grabbing strangers on the street and charging into oncoming traffic, delusional beyond reach.

When Sally's mania didn't fade, Greenberg reluctantly checked her into a double-locked psychiatric ward, where drug-dulled patients were "heavy-eyed, out of focus, like smudged photographs of themselves." So begins the summer chronicled in "Hurry Down Sunshine," a memoir that reads more like a page-turner.

Poets Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath, novelist William Styron and others have vividly described mental disorders in the first person, but Greenberg contributes something new -- the grief of a parent on the sidelines of madness. A gifted writer, he seeks understanding through literary comparisons and wonders how much his psyche has in common with his daughter's. At one point, he even sampled her medication in an effort to understand what she was going through.

Greenberg now lives on Manhattan's Upper West Side with his second wife, choreographer Pat Cremins, and their 10-year-old son. On a recent winter morning, his sparse but comfortably appointed living room was sun-drenched, a weathered baby grand in one corner. Ceiling-high bookshelves bear out his wide-ranging reading interests, from Dante to DeLillo.

Slightly built, with an amiably inquisitive face, Greenberg has a centered demeanor cut by bursts of intensity. His gestures grew animated when he described the "diabolical siren song" of mania that he came to know through Sally.

"In its earliest moments, it's extremely pleasurable, a feeling of charisma, linguistic fluidity, energy, omnipotence. Who among us would turn away from that? You have to be burned quite a few times before you realize the signs -- agitation, grandiosity, no sleeping, paranoia."

Greenberg and Cremins visited the hospital every day, bringing Sally artichokes and chocolates. She fluctuated between incoherence and wild oracular pronouncements, her mind as unruly as her mop of amber curls.

Diabolical Diabolical: With "Hurry Down Sunshine," Michael Greenberg tells the wrenching story of his young daughter's sudden, seemingly inexplicable mental breakdown. Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minnesota) February 8, 2009
Sunday

"Pat was a steady voice of realism," Greenberg said of those days. "I was emotionally buffeted between hope and despair. ... I kept trying to reestablish some point of contact that would show me she was coming back, and every time I failed, it stabbed me. This shell of a person was impersonating my daughter."

Sally's mother, Robin, also visited, curling up on the bed with her. Robin and Michael had been high school sweethearts, married young and divorced when Sally was in first grade. Tired of the city, Robin moved to rural Vermont, where she remarried and became a baker.

"It didn't seem possible we could be responsible for this kind of thing," Greenberg said. "It seemed a force of nature. You're either told it's genetic, which is a kind of blame, or that it's environmental, which is total blame. At least we've advanced since the 1960s, when the mother was always blamed for everything."

His widowed mother also visited, and they discussed Greenberg's brother Steve, diagnosed as a borderline sociopath and incapable of holding a job or maintaining relationships. Every week, Greenberg meets him at a supermarket to buy him groceries. Steve's bleak, lonely existence portends a similar possible future for Sally.

When Sally was well enough to come home, she had to maintain a strict regimen of drugs that made her, she said, "feel like I'm packed in foam rubber." One morning, Greenberg took a full dose himself, and soon felt "neck-deep in a swamp."

"I quickly understood that drugs were not going to save her," he said. "I think it's very difficult and unrewarding for psychiatrists and nursing staff, because there's very little in the way of a cure."

Avoiding exhibitionism

"Hurry Down Sunshine" was not a book that Greenberg intended to write.

"I felt there was something gauche, too revealing, about it," he said. "I wasn't sure I could universalize it. It started as an essay on mental illness, but then I dropped that, and just wrote about the moment, like you would a storm or a shipwreck. All the great writing about mental illness, all the way back to 'King Lear,' was about the experience of being psychotic. So I saw justification in doing something different, that it wouldn't be just exhibitionism."

His teenage years had been unusual in a far different way from his daughter's. The fourth of five sons in a Brooklyn Jewish family, he moved into his own apartment at age 16 and worked nights at a bookstore to pay the rent.

At 19, lured by the Latin American literary boom of the 1960s and early '70s, he and Robin moved to Buenos Aires, where he taught himself to be a reporter. He wrote pieces for the UPI news service and several U.S. publications, including the Boston Globe and Village Voice.

Back in New York by 1975, he supported himself with odd jobs while working on a 700-page novel about two New Jersey brothers. It was bought by a major publisher, but the company changed hands before the book could be published.

After that disappointment, Greenberg worked as a criminal court interpreter and later started a small trucking company. He eventually returned to creative journalism and has been writing "Freelance," an observational lifestyle column, for the London Times Literary Supplement since 2003. A collection of his columns in book form, interspersed with what he calls "graphic interruptions," is coming out in September, about the same time as the paperback version of "Hurry Down Sunshine."

An impact on the family

Sally Greenberg has now had manic depression for 12 years. In his book's postscript, her father summarizes the events in her life since then, including graduation from high school, a short marriage to a former classmate, and work with children and the elderly. Her successes have been interspersed with periods of psychosis and hospitalization. In 2008, she lived in a "therapeutic community" near Robin's home in Vermont, where residents raise their own vegetables and work with animals. She recently graduated to independent living, and got a job with a veterinarian. She and her father talk almost daily.

Her illness has had a strong impact on everyone in the family, he added. Cremins disbanded her modern-dance company four years ago to pursue a graduate degree in social work and infant development. Sally's older brother, Aaron, works in child protection for UNICEF.

Diabolical Diabolical: With "Hurry Down Sunshine," Michael Greenberg tells the wrenching story of his young daughter's sudden, seemingly inexplicable mental breakdown. Star Tribune (Minneapolis, Minnesota) February 8, 2009 Sunday

In the decade since Sally's hospitalization, societal attitudes toward mental illness have evolved somewhat. But those affected by it still feel alone, Greenberg said.

"We can change the language. We can call it bipolar mental illness or a disorder or a disease. But it's difficult to change the deep-seated fear and suspicion. When someone's depressed, it's their fault, a failure of will. The taboo persists because it's a very lonely thing ... excruciating for the person who's ill and has lost the ability to communicate, but also for the family."

Kristin Tillotson --612-673-7046

TALKING VOLUMES

Who: Michael Greenberg, author of "Hurry Down Sunshine," interviewed by Kerri Miller of Minnesota Public Radio.

When: 7 p.m. Feb. 24.

Where: Fitzgerald Theater, 10 E. Exchange St., St. Paul.

What: A regional book club co-sponsored by the Star Tribune and Minnesota Public Radio, in partnership with the Loft Literary Center.

Tickets: \$20. \$18 for MPR members. 651-290-1221, or [http:// fitzgeraldtheater. publicradio.org/events](http://fitzgeraldtheater.publicradio.org/events).

To see more of the Star Tribune, or to subscribe to the newspaper, go to <http://www.startribune.com/>. Copyright (c) 2009, Star Tribune, Minneapolis Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services. For reprints, email tmsreprints@permissionsgroup.com, call 800-374-7985 or 847-635-6550, send a fax to 847-635-6968, or write to The Permissions Group Inc., 1247 Milwaukee Ave., Suite 303, Glenview, IL 60025, USA.

LOAD-DATE: February 7, 2009

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

ACC-NO: 20090208-MS-Diabolical-Diabolical-0208

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

JOURNAL-CODE: MS

Copyright 2009 Star Tribune

The Seattle Times

Friday, September 19, 2008 - Page updated at 12:00 AM

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

"Hurry Down Sunshine": An honest chronicle of a daughter's mental illness

By Barbara Lloyd McMichael
Special to The Seattle Times

Twelve years ago on a sultry summer's day, 15-year-old Sally Greenberg had a psychotic episode that carried her out of the Greenwich Village apartment she shared with her father and stepmother and into the streets, where she accosted passers-by, ran into traffic and preached passionate incoherencies to the cops who showed up to take her away.

In "Hurry Down Sunshine," (Other Press, 234 pp., \$24.95), Michael Greenberg chronicles his daughter's baffling itinerary through madness — the spectacular crackup, the psychiatric ward and the drug-calibrated aftermath.

He concedes that there may have been foreshadowings of his daughter's mental illness — from her early difficulties in deciphering the alphabet despite a preternaturally sharp wit, to her adolescent theatricality and her intense empathy for the most vulnerable in the world, whether babies or homeless people.

But he and Sally's mother, and then her stepmother, had tended to justify those as the signs of an exceptional child. As a writer himself, married to a choreographer, Greenberg knew the importance of allowing latitude for one's imagination. And as a native New Yorker, "I have a high tolerance for aberrant behavior, I suppose," he writes.

But the morning after the police brought his daughter home, there was no mistaking the realization that Sally had slipped into a profoundly manic state — words tumbling forth with an urgency that superseded meaning, wild actions propelled by a blazing energy that engulfed and threatened to devour.

The trip to the hospital emergency room, Sally's commitment to a psychiatric clinic, the uncomfortable dealings with his ex-wife and the bewildering hours that turned into days and then weeks — Greenberg takes the reader through the whole harrowing ordeal.

Despite its focus on Sally, "Hurry Down Sunshine" includes a substantial cast of characters. Her immediate family and close relatives, including a mentally ill uncle, were affected in various ways by her illness, and their responses ran the gamut from denial to introspection to self-blame.

Sally's confinement put new pressures on relationships that were tenuous anyway — between Greenberg and his brother, between Greenberg and his ex-wife, between his ex-wife and his current wife, even between his current wife and their landlord.

Beyond that, there is an impressive roster of individuals who may be regarded as secondary characters to this particular story, but whose own stories, even as only partially shaded in by the author, are shimmering

reminders of the magnificent epic of human experience being played out in the world every day. Greenberg deftly shows that sometimes the ones who bear the "stigma" of a diagnosis can possess potent distillations of truth, while others who move about in the "real world" seem to have only a marginal grasp on reality. At one point even Greenberg, who has assumed the role of stalwart guide through this discomfiting tour of madness, engaged in behavior that will leave his readers shaken.

Greenberg sought solace and insight by studying the lives of others who have gone through similar painful experiences — poet Robert Lowell's own lifelong battle with mental illness, and James Joyce's desperate attempts to explain and accommodate his daughter Lucia's mental pathology.

But there are no real answers, and no happy endings. With family support, medications and the help of a psychiatrist, Sally was able to negotiate a path back into some kind of stabilized life. But as Greenberg's painfully honest book makes clear, there are patches of calm and then there are setbacks for anyone dealing with mental illness. It is an unending series of negotiations with the chemistry of one's brain.

Copyright © 2008 The Seattle Times Company