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BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEW

Finding Dad, Paranoid Schizophrenia: An End to the Search

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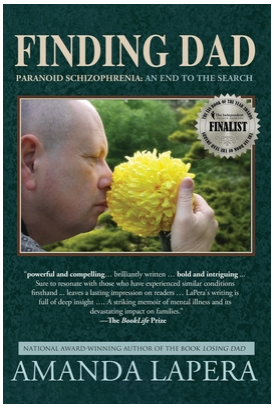

Book Title: Finding Dad, Paranoid Schizophrenia: An End to the Search

Author: Amanda LaPera

Publication Details: Adamo Press, 2024, 325 pp., $19.95, paperback

Amanda LaPera's second memoir, *Finding Dad,* is the sequel to *Losing Dad*.[1] While the loss of their father was tragic for the family, finding him is shown to bring its own difficulties. The legal, financial, and health care systems are not set up to make anything easy for loved ones of those with severe mental illness (SMI). The author's experience leads her to involvement with the National Alliance for Mental Illness, ultimately serving on the Board of Directors for the Orange County Affiliate. This book takes the reader on the journey of trials and tribulations of the family after a person with SMI has been "found."

When the author gets the call in 2017 that authorities located her father, she assumes he is dead, having not heard from him since 2008. She is happily surprised to learn Joseph is alive. She registered him as missing in 2011. But authorities learning his location only means Joseph is no longer on the missing persons list. The officer can only tell her that Joseph is in the United States and at a facility. "Nobody shares information to help a family track down a loved one with a severe mental illness as long as they're alive" (p.3). She is dismayed that authorities will no longer keep her DNA to identify a contact person if, in the future, they find Joseph dead.

Thus begins the author's renewed search for her father. Her quest is complicated by health insurance and portability and accountability act (HIPPA) laws, the need for power of attorney (POA), family dynamics, financial opacity, Joseph's physical and mental illnesses, and Joseph's ongoing anosognosia. By necessity, the author becomes creative in tracking down her father. Her tenacity reflects "giving back the love… [she was] lucky enough to receive" (p. 178). She remains frustrated that no one "can help me find my dad to help him, until it's too late for me to help him" (p. 15).

She catches a break in July 2018 with a nonverbal tell affirming her suspicions of where her father resides. But even with this information, the author is stymied by HIPAA and worried about alienating her father due to his paranoia. She devises a plan for connecting with her father slowly. By Christmas 2018, she reaches her father by phone for the first time in 10 years.

Although they find their father, "the old dad was still lost" (p. 30).

> "The dad we knew and loved died slowly beginning in 1996. By 1999, Dad was dead. This was schizophrenia's reproduction of our dad, a clone of his body, but not his mind or heart." (p.57)

In such cases, the family often feels helpless despite hiring a private nurse to provide additional services and advocacy at his facility. Private nurses, however, do not ensure that Joseph will take his medications or comply with COVID restrictions or refrain from aggression that could get him expelled from the facility. Nothing stops the continual turnover of service providers.

Throughout the book, the author struggles with who has decision making power for Joseph's treatment. Without POA, she has no legal say but advocates on his behalf. Joseph's rationality is unpredictable; he refuses to acknowledge his illnesses. Doctors change frequently playing "Russian Roulette with the wheel of medicines" (p.136) due to not knowing Joseph well. The author obtains POA in 2019 after overcoming multiple

hurdles. From the outset, she is reluctant to pursue conservatorship or guardianship "due to the horror stories [she'd] heard" (p. 136). POA, however, does not solve the problem of Joseph refusing medication. That would involve a court order, and "mental health court is notoriously strict" (p. 238).

This memoir reveals the amount of time, energy, resources, and advocacy needed to care for a loved one with SMI. It shows how the laws intending to protect individual rights create major hurdles for family members. The book inspires compassion for families impacted by SMI, but could have benefitted from a more formal discussion of the legal options around caring for a loved one with SMI. Questions arise about court orders, guardianship, and conservatorship that warrant further discussion. LaPera touches on these topics, but a section dedicated to legal issues would have been useful.

Ultimately, this is a love story. The number of obstacles the author must overcome to help her father is astonishing. She describes initial bewilderment, navigating the health care system, and addressing burnout. Learning that "the best thing to do is reach out in every direction and ask for help" (p. 195) proves crucial to her healing journey.

REFERENCES

1. LaPera A. *Losing Dad, Paranoid Schizophrenia: A Family's Search for Hope*. 2nd ed. Adamo Press; 2023.