Words With My Father



A Bipolar Journey
Through Turbulent Times

Lowell Klessig • Lukas Klessig

BOCK CLUB KIT

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

GRATITUDE

Thank you for exploring this story and its ideas with me. I so hope you find it meaningful, engaging and important.

REQUEST

Please read the story progressively from front to back. The latter chapters, postlude and photographs will mean magnitudes more.

TRIGGERS

The book contains two situations where attempted suicide occurs:

The first is a glancing reference to a friend's suicide attempt.

The second occurrence describes a first-person scenario with greater detail and introspection about the ideation/planning and attempt itself.

The book also mentions a situation of sexual abuse and assault, although in a non-graphic or descriptive manner.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think Lukas Klessig chose the title Words With My Father instead of several alternatives?
 What does it mean to you?
- What spoke to you most while reading and thinking about WWMF? What aspects did you most relate to?
 - Did you find WWMF an easy or challenging read? Did you "enjoy" reading it?
 - Has mental illness been a taboo subject in your family?
 Share some examples of if and how your family approached talking about it.
- The authors of *WWMF* try to describe the nuance of individual bipolar experiences.

 They emphasize that management of the condition is personal.

 Based on your knowledge of the disorder, how accurate do you find the portrayal of bipolar illness in the book?
- Most of the storyline takes place decades ago. Do the narrative and its messages seem relevant to life now?
 Do the son's "Reflections" help the book resonate with our current world?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - cont.

- Do you consider Lowell Klessig negligent for putting himself and others in danger during episodes of mania?
 Does he eventually come to truly regret some of those incidents?
- Have you known people who hide behind their diagnosis or use it as an excuse or reason for their behavior?
 Did Lowell or Lukas Klessig do that?
 If we can never fully know, can or should we ask this question?
 - Lowell Klessig struggled to understand what was happening to him for years.
 He went through several rounds of imperfect or inaccurate diagnosis and treatment.
 Do you think the efficiency and precision of mental health care has improved since then? How so?
 - Some people who have bipolar disorder don't consider it an illness or condition that requires fixing.

 Does that assertion strike you as valid or defensible?
 - Lukas Klessig has stated that he wrote and edited the narrative to blend many styles and genres from comedy to horror to mystery to adventure. Did you appreciate this approach? Why or why not?
 - Writing allowed the father one way to deal with manic energy.
 Do any specific activities help you (or someone you know) steady the mind?

BONUS PHOTOS



Dispatches from Dad's Roadtrips







AUTHOR Q&A with Lukas Klessig



Who is this book for?

First, I think of it as a *story*, communicated in book form. We hope to offer it in other media formats soon. People like stories more, right?

To actually answer your question:

Most specifically: those with bipolar disorder.

More specifically: those concerned with, or just interested in, mental health issues and stories.

Specifically: all those who appreciate a captivating and meaningful narrative.

Did you feel qualified to write about this subject?

I do not have bipolar disorder like my father did and other relatives do, but have dealt with OCD, anxiety and depression off and on from age thirteen forward.

Throughout my (and my father's) mental illness journey and in the course of writing *WWMF*, countless hours have succumbed to the duties of researching and exploring bipolar and other mental illnesses. I am NOT a medical expert, but I do think my compass and intentions point true on bringing light to these realities of life.

If you disagree about something I've said or something you find askance in *WWMF*, please tell me! We all learn from discussion and dialogue.

What was the hardest part about writing this book?

Definitely, attempting to refine the language and structure of the dual voices and timelines.

My Dad spent thousands of hours writing and rewriting the original manuscript I adapted into *WWMF*, which required thousands of additional hours. It's one of the three hardest things I've ever done.

What were the other two?

Dealing with the mental gymnastics of repetitive rituals and involuntary obsessive rumination during acute OCD episodes. And, then, predictably, the end of an intense romantic relationship in my mid-twenties.

Author Q&A with Lukas Klessig

Could you tell us a bit about the cover and design of the book?

Sure. Our primary goal was to write and design a book that relays the story's message in an immediate and evocative way. We didn't want anything like a boilerplate "memoir" product with my Dad's picture plastered on the cover and some overused (albeit noble) taglines about "living your best life" or "stopping the stigma" as descriptors on the back.

We designed Dad's story, my reflections, the cover, the pictures, everything...to straddle the line between past and present, between nostalgia and our current culture, between memoir, mystery, adventure, action, horror, comedy, self-help and history. The intention of that genre-mixing is not to be all things to all people, but to invoke intrigue, surprise, interpretation and tension. To cause the reader to wonder what happens next and to never provide them with complete closure or resolution.

This book does not represent a pedantic memoir or self-improvement manual. It should come across as an entertaining and nuanced story with lessons learned and shared (mostly by me in my reflections). It should provide inspiration, but also not shy away from darkness, reality and the fact that every individual is their own "collection of contradictions."

What did it feel like discovering and, then, including and editing your father's suicide attempt?

I have mixed feelings about suicide. In my view, we should allow people in certain circumstances to decide whether or not to end their life. However, in many situations, we have a duty to intervene. My dad shared (and wrote quite a lot about) a similar outlook.

Given that, and my personality, working on that scene proved much less fraught than it might for others.

You've mentioned elsewhere that you think therapy for mental illnesses still overly focuses and relies on patients' pasts to explain their issues. Why do you feel strongly about that?

As a disclaimer, I don't wish to play the armchair expert and I do not have every single bit of knowledge on this, but I think that reliving or rethinking the past in guided and close examination serves a useful role in releasing people from trauma's grasp - most notably in PTSD cases. However, overwhelming research and metastudies over many decades show the same sort of intimate recollection therapy does not apply to or benefit those living with most other mental illnesses, including bipolar disorder. In fact, focusing too much on the past may take away from limited therapy time to generate actual strategies for the present and future. Doing so also diminishes the agency a person senses to proactively make tangible changes now.

Freudian notions of pinning the cause and severity of disorders on childhood, parenting and random events in one's past seem mostly like hogwash now. I might be wrong, but, then, so would the near consensus of present-day researchers.

What do you think about how the mental health care system in the U.S. functions?

Without any doubt, we face massive deficiencies and inequalities in access and quality of care. From doctor shortages and insurance snafus to continuity of care and funding research:

We can, and must, do better.

That said, I do get frustrated by media and people condemning the industry without nuance. Providing this care involves complexity and cost. It involves uncertainty and trial and error. It also involves many, many selfless professionals putting in countless hours to assist people to thrive more. Also, this is a global concern, not just here .. in many places, it's much more difficult to get help.

Do you remain optimistic about the future of treating and even preventing mental illness?

Always, and here's why: Humans have this exceptional ability to solve problems and uncover the answers to questions. Nowhere have we demonstrated this more than through the exponential advancements in medicine of the last century. Addressing maladies of the brain and mind has progressed too, but at a much slower pace. And for a fundamental reason, right?

Author Q&A with Lukas Klessig

It's lagged because our brains sit behind a case of bone called the skull and because the human brain is the most intricate and complex structure that we know of. Plus, if we mess with it just a little too much, we die.

Those hindrances won't disappear, but neither will our drive to overcome them. It won't happen fast enough and we'll suffer many setbacks, but knowledge and breakthroughs will accelerate. And that should give us purpose and hope.

Why did you write this book?

My Dad passed away before he could finish this story. The disease that killed him also took away his cognitive and communication capacities. For a deep and constant thinker like my father, there's really no way you can relieve the torture of his faculties mercilessly fading. But, if he knew that I would share his message, that I would continue his work, *that*, I thought, could give him some peace.

What's next for you? Are you writing anything new? Editing more of your father's pieces?

All our efforts currently focus on relaying the story and wisdom of *WWMF*. We have more than enough material and ideas for several more books.

However, we're going to let this one sink in for people because we think they'll recognize this narrative as expertly-crafted, relevant to their lives and something they'll want to spend some time with.

Anything we or readers can do to help?

Tell your friends! Send feedback! Leave REVIEWS! (click icons below for direct links)









SELECTED RESOURCES

National Alliance on Mental Illness nami.org

Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance

dbsalliance.org

bp Magazine bphope.com

Mayo Clinic mayoclinic.org