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For thirty-two years Ken Steele lived with the devastating symptoms of schizophrenia, tortured by inner voices commanding him to kill himself, ravaged by the delusions of paranoia, barely surviving on the ragged edges of society. In this inspiring story, Steele tells the story of his hard-won recovery from schizophrenia and how activism and advocacy helped him regain his sanity and go on to give hope and support to so many others like him.

The Day the Voices Stopped Details


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Christine Fay says

This gripping memoir is a memorable account of Ken's struggle with schizophrenia and a lack of family support that found him in some unpleasant (to say the least) life circumstances. These voices told him that he was worthless, that he ought to end his life. Someone is born with schizophrenia – it is not something a person chooses. Ken's voices started at the age of fourteen. His family was in denial and did not get Ken the help he so desperately needed. The voices indeed stopped one day with the addition of a new medication, however, that brought with it a new set of challenges as well. This is a highly recommended, maybe should be a required read in order to foster empathy and awareness of the struggles faced by the millions of people worldwide who suffer from some form of mental illness. It's time to de-stigmatize these illnesses which are not chosen by the people who endure them. Ken's therapist whom he found later in life, helped him come to terms with his reality. "Little by little, and over a long period, I gave her as much truth as I was able to recall, along with many of my fears. She helped me confront my feelings about my family: my mother's coldness, the knowledge that I had disappointed my father, the birth of a "replacement" when I was fifteen. Each case of schizophrenia is a different mix of genetic and psychological factors, and I was striving to come to terms with my story. The work was hard and painful" (202).

Gina says

This is a really important book for several reasons. The first is that it gives a very clear idea of what having schizophrenia is like. That insight is gravely needed for those who have not experienced, and I can imagine it being very helpful for families. Ken Steele tells you what it was like inside his head, and you can follow many periods of progress and setbacks.

The most amazing part is that there is a day when the voices do stop. It's an important reminder that there is hope. Even before that, there are times when he does really well, so it's a good reminder that medications have improved and that more is known now about how to treat mental illness.

It's also a reminder of the very real risks there are, and the need for advocacy. Some hospitals were much better than others. Some doctors were much better than others. The best doctors were the ones who listened to information about side effects and what helped. Many things that happened to him were criminal, and some should be.

One of the saddest things is that his parents initially refused to seek treatment for him, because of the stigma, and while the medicine still would have been fairly primitive then, you can't help but wonder what he could have been spared. His life was definitely shortened by health problems that might have been avoided.

The most important message of the book is to not shun the mentally ill, but to help them. That means treatment, but it also means good treatment, paying attention to whether the professionals are really acting appropriately or not. It requires laws and funding, which is why he worked for voter empowerment.

So the content of the book is remarkably important, but it is also a clear and interesting read.

Rosa says

Ken Steele penulis sekaligus tokoh utama dalam buku ini adalah seorang penderita skizofrenia. tanda umum yang biasanya dapat dijumpai pada penderita skizofrenia adalah adanya halusinasi (baik suara/visual), waham (merasa dirinya besar), kecenderungan bunuh diri, rendah diri, dan biasanya banyak dijumpai pada laki-laki (perempuan juga bisa kok, tergantung jenis skizofrenia, tetapi penyakit ini biasanya diwariskan ke anak laki-laki).

nah, dalam kisah ini dipaparkan bagaimana masa kecil Ken yang hidup penuh tekanan, hingga pada suatu hari muncullah gejala awal skizofrenia pada diri Ken, yaitu halusinasi suara yang memintanya untuk melakukan bunuh diri. keluarga Ken yang tidak tahan mengusir Ken dari rumah dan menempatkannya pada rumah sakit jiwa.

Beranjak dewasa kelakuan Ken semakin memprihatinkan, sudah menjadi nasib Ken harus keluar masuk rumah sakit, karena Ken merasa tersiksa dengan terapi yang diberikan RS, belum lagi perlakuan antar temannya sesama pasien yang membuatnya trauma (beberapa kali Ken mengalami perkosaan). kehidupan Ken sangat menyedihkan.

hingga pada suatu hari, setelah belasan tahun dihantui oleh suara gaib yang selalu memintanya bunuh diri, Ken sembuh total. dia mendirikan organisasi yang menaungi para penderita skizofrenia.

terus terang saya kasihan pada Ken. saya kira skizofrenia itu sama dengan psikopat (kebanyakan nonton film horror si..he..)

well, novel yang berupa memoir ini cocok banget dibaca untuk menambah pengetahuan mengenai penyakit kejiwaan.

Laura says

A first hand explanation of schizophrenia and how this one fellow coped with it. Very enlightening and at the same time difficult to read. To know someone, and there are many, who suffer from mental disease and are treated in abhorrent ways in this day and age does not speak well for our society.

I kept remembering a school chum. We went to the same schools for over 9 years and were relatively good friends. Suddenly he disappeared from school after freshman year. When we were in our early 20s he took his life. This book relates the statistic that 1 in every 13 diagnosed schizophrenic commits suicide. My friend was one of them. Reading this made me feel his loss again and helped me fully understand the torment he went through.

Tracy says

Haunting. Firstly because of the trauma of living with voices and hallucinations. Secondly because he became a lost person in the under-belly of our society and was a victim to much of the evil most of us, thankfully, never have to deal with and don't like to think about.

I feel like I understand much better the constant destructive dialogue that goes on in the mind of someone who hears voices. Very sad and quite upsetting section on life in the mental health system during the 1980s. Yet this book is extremely hopeful in the fact that this man recovered completely.

As open as we are becoming about mental health issues, this is still quite a stigmatized subject. For anyone interested in schizophrenia or mental health issues.

I admit that I wanted some of his memories to be hallucinations. With as many stories as he told his whole life, I hoped that some of the pain in this story was exaggerated or made up.

Elisse says

This is an amazing first person story about schizophrenia. It is a hard story to read, because the author had such a difficult life. By his description, he was abandoned by his parents in his teens when he developed schizophrenia and struggled to survive multiple hospitalizations and life on the street. He finally is placed on effective medication late in his life and is able to begin to help others who are trying to navigate the mental health system in the US.

Tara says

Hard to read, but even harder to stop reading. I hope this book is as intense as it gets in this class, because I'm not sure I could handle much more. Steele hits rock-bottom -- broke, alone, suicidal, schizophrenic--and often turns to alcohol and prostitution in between his frequent stays at mental institutions. His voices do stop eventually, thanks to a new medication, and he dedicates the rest of his life to mental health care reform--how could he not, after the abuse and neglect he suffered at virtually all the institutions? But his solution to improve the lives of the mentally ill is more government. When the government is only called in to be our savior, isn't the church usually failing to do its part? How rare is it to see a church involved in caring for the mentally ill? They aren't cute, like the babies we save from abortion. They are frightening, confusing, violent...and human beings made in God's image, who desperately need His Love. I'm glad I read the book, because I was largely ignorant of the trials a mentally ill person faces, both in their personal lives and in their attempts to navigate the medical system.

Arnie says

Although the story sometimes drags, this strikes me as a realistic account of how a man lives with schizophrenia. He describes the ups and downs of his life, including being on and off medications and in and out of hospitals. The conclusion of the book has great observations about how individuals and public policy need to respond to the needs of the mentally ill.

Sydney Miller says

Although people write memoirs all the time, I doubt many people with Schizophrenia could do a better job than Ken Steele. He showed the side of an issue most of us don't get the chance to see, or even know how to connect to. Dealing with Schizophrenia in a time when mental health wasn't at the top of society's priorities is not easy to give insight on to people, and I think he did a magnificent job. Normally in memoirs you would expect the author to have long, choppy, complicated sentences that are all jumbled together. You can pretty

much tell they have little writing experience, even when some of them have help from authors. The Day The Voices Stopped is not like that at all. It's writing in a very simple and easy style, but that doesn't take away from the impact of the story. It went beyond expectations because of how the story line and sentences flowed so well, which coming from someone who has read many memoirs is a shocking surprise. The only problem was that I could never really grasp how much time was going/had gone by. Other than that, it all just came together like watching a movie would. There's not much to say on the writing because of how simple it was. This is in no way dissing the style of the book, it's just simply that it was an easy read. It's difficult to analyze and break down a text that doesn't have much complication, schemes, or any other higher up skills in the art of writing. You really have to appreciate writing like this. Everyone praises the complex, in depth writing with complicated sentences and metaphors, but after reading so many texts with that style, it's refreshing to sit down and take a moment to read a plain book that has a straight forward thought and story line. The meaning is still as strong, but he didn't have to sugar coat his writing abilities. I can't stress enough how in no way that diminishes the story. He tells his life beginning when he was 14 and started experiencing Schizophrenia for the first time, and how he spirals out of control for years after that. It's heart breaking when he's in and out of hospitals, contemplating suicide over and over, when hospital employees who are there to help want nothing to do with such a disgusting creature. As he makes friends and allies, works hard to fight the voices, and eventually overcomes Schizophrenia, it's one of the most heartwarming and relieving feelings. I have the urge to call it "going through life with him", but in no way are we going through what he went through, and the majority of us will never go through what he went through. We can only try and imagine a little bit by the words he left behind. He accomplished so much in his life and this book really proves that anyone get through the hard times. It makes you think twice about the homeless people you see on the street, questioning whether they even are hopeless. His goal was to shine light on those with Schizophrenia and how they can be helped; in reality he helped so many more than he intended.

Estie says

Ken Steele was a remarkable man and his remarkable story provides a glimpse into the mind and life of someone suffering from schizophrenia. He started hearing voices at age 14 and this book chronicles his descent in a full blown psychotic disorder, his many hospitalizations across the country, and his life on the streets. But aside from painting the picture of a very ill man, this memoir also shows the person beneath the illness - and how his beautiful humanness is always there just beneath the surface. The writing is simple yet poignant, and the story is captivating, enlightening, and inspiring.

Mike says

Great book if you want to see what someone who hears voices and sees hallucinations lives like. It is the kind of book I recommend if you are interested in learning how to counsel people who are not like you.

Sujata says

if you wanna know what life is like for a schizophrenic and what it was like to try to navigate the mental health system during the second half of the 20th century, this would be a great place to start. a political and thoroughly engaging memoir.

Jay says

This book changed my life and the way I look at people who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and the mental health system in general. I am currently a bio-medical student at Rutgers studying Psychological rehabilitation and we had to read this book for a literature review paper...but honestly, this assignment ended up becoming so much more to me. This man's book is so devastating, heart breaking, and at times it truly just makes you want to scream. All the lost cries of despair between these pages is just..overwhelming. I hope to one day meet Ken. He has experienced so much pain in this life, and if I ever met him, I would hug him right and tell him I'm sorry.

I am one of those people that treats all people like family. This story breaks me.

Jennifer says

I remember the night my mother came up to the bedroom my brother shared with me and told me that my uncle, who had been missing for many months, had been found - under the ice in the Fens in downtown boston, close to where he was living at the time. My uncle started hearing voices in his late teens/early twenties, and had been missing or in institutions most of my young life. When we did see him, he was charming, artistically gifted, and quiet. But we did not see him often - only heard that he was missing or in the hospital, and eventually that the voices he was hearing, that he thought was the voice of god, told him to drown himself in the river near his home. My grandfather, who was fighting cancer at the time, took a blow from the news, and died a year later.

As a result, I was always both sympathetic and curious about the disease. We lived in a family that feared that we kids might develop the same plight, but, of course, we missed the bullet. No one is sure where my uncle inherited the disease from.

Of all the books I have read concerning the topic of schizophrenia. this one was truely the best. It is in no way the normal heartwarming tale you would expect of triumph over adversity. Diagnosed at 14, Ken is haunted by voices taunting him to kill himself. This goes on for 32 years, until one day, due to the prescription of a new a-typical schizophrenia drug, the voices stop, and in trying to build a new life for himself, in a strange new world, Steele goes on to be one of the most important mental health advocates of our time. The road he takes to get there, however, is painful and hard to read. He is abandoned by family, who had a second child, shortly after he is diagnosed, and then give up on their first son, to protect their second, and to try to keep away the shame involved in having a sick son. He is again and again forced into prostitution and life on the streets. Ken's tale takes him all over the country from institution to half-way house to society and back - all the way from Maine to Hawaii.

Not for the easily upset, this story is a must for anyone who has any familiarity with this topic. This book gave me the gift of better understanding what my uncle, and many people like him, had to deal with and why some of them didn't make it. It is the most real story I have read. One that truely parelles and illustrates the life of someone who is that sick and struggling to maintain some semblence of day to day life. It also made me better understand the need for change in both the health care system and society and how they go about treating/dealing with the mentally ill.

Laura says

I read this book in about 4 days. It is a vivid description of what his life was like from the day the "voices began" to the day they stopped. This book is informative and well-written. His life was a living hell as he struggled with his mental illness. He became an advocate for mental illness and did quite a lot of good to help others and their families. A book worth picking up and reading.
