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Rarely has a public figure addressed such difficult, intimate issues with such courage and bravery. In a moving, passionate memoir, former Senator George McGovern recalls the events leading up to his daughter Terry's death as a result of alcoholism. What McGovern learned from Terry is an unforgettable, poignant tale certain to engender controversy and compassion. of photos.

Terry: My Daughter's Life-And-Death Struggle with Alcoholism Details

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From Reader Review Terry: My Daughter's Life-And-Death Struggle with Alcoholism for online ebook

Annie Smith says

George McGovern (who I voted for in my first presidential election) really bared his soul in this saddest of all stories. Nothing prepares you for the horrendous grip that alcohol (and other drugs of the time) had on this young woman - his daughter, Terry. He admits that mistakes that were made in her treatment - but really, I'm not sure anything could have helped. As they say, she was powerless. This was an interesting and compulsive read. Not only do we come to understand Terry, but also, her life intertwined with that of her Dad and his immersion into the politics of the day. Thanks, George. (He died in 2012)

Lennie says

In this book, Senator George McGovern discusses his daughter, Terry, who tragically died when she collapsed in the snow while drunk, fell asleep, and then froze to death. Terry struggled with alcohol and depression for most of her life and her father discusses how the family tried desperately to help her overcome her addiction. I enjoyed reading this book and it goes to show you that alcoholism can affect anyone (rich or poor, young or old, famous or not famous). I think people will be more educated about this disease after reading this story.

John says

This is truly a wonderfully written book, yet it is one of the saddest books I've ever read. I didn't know much about George McGovern before reading this book (being extremely politically conservative and a staunch Republican myself I've never had the desire to read anything about him or by him) so liking this book so much took me by surprise. It's very well written, of course; but what really surprised me is how Senator McGovern pulled no punches in telling the story of how his beloved daughter Terry tried again and again to stop drinking for good...but always returned to the bottle whether it was hours, days, weeks, months or even years since her last drink. This book tells Terry's story so intimately that the reader feels almost as if she helped her dad write it...and in a way, I guess she did. This is probably the best book ever written on what it feels like to watch a loved one slowly kill themselves through addiction, trying to save them and ultimately knowing that you simply can't save someone that can't save themselves. Heartbreaking.

Jane says

Written twenty years ago, this book offers us still, today, an honest, eye-opening account of a disease that will not disappear: alcoholism. Combined with a genetic disposition toward depression, alcoholism can be, and often is, a lethal combination. George McGovern's memoir about his daughter Theresa and her problems with both depression and alcoholism is a heart-breaking expose of what can happen when you have either one or the other or both of these problems. At the same time, though, it is not a maudlin account of what happened and how it could have been different but rather an honest, heartfelt, hopeful piece of writing. I

highly recommend this book.

TC says

Senator McGovern makes the case that alcoholism is a genetic, medical disease that must be treated as such, rather than just through counseling as a symptom of psychological trauma. He presents this thesis through a meandering recollection of his daughter Terry's lifelong struggle with drinking, which eventually lead to her untimely death in 1994. His point is well taken as a family member who paid for countless outpatient and rehab treatments: he can state first-hand what seemed to work better than others. In particular, he believes the twelve-step program was most effective; and that most counterproductive was counseling that sought to root the drinking in childhood disappointments--as this merely led to more self-pity, and in turn, more drinking.

The recollections themselves are a combination of his own words, those of his daughter from her copious life journals, and those of friends and relatives from conversations and letters. McGovern writes like every other modern US politician I've read: rather clunkily. In this case, he overlaps timelines constantly, and repeats the same ideas and observations over and over. He could have made this a linear story of his daughter's unraveling; he chose instead to make it almost a random thread, that seems to only have meaning to him. This lessens the emotional impact of the book, for me.

He also throws in some memoir of his own political career, a tiny bit more than necessary to know the story of his daughter; but, he's obviously still passionate about his views. And, it is interesting to read. (One insight he provides is that the debacle involving Senator Eagleton was partly a result of Terry's own struggle with depression--he didn't want to dump his running mate due to his mental health issues, because he was especially sensitive to his daughter's condition; he obviously paid a very steep political price for that sensitivity.)

Despite the fact this story could have been told better, I do find his argument compelling about his beliefs on the proper treatment of alcoholism, and his observations about how little understood it is, despite an entire industry devoted to treating it. He doesn't make his case from medical authority, of course; but having watched a decades-long destruction of his child, he certainly can make the argument from his position as a family member who dearly wishes there had been a definitive answer.

In the end there is no real take-away from this, for me anyway; there's not much of a "well I'll make sure not to do that, then" as there are with other "family-of-addict" stories (such as the one by David Sheff). It really does appear, at least as the story is told here, that some people seem born to self-destruct, despite their gifts, the love and support they receive, and all the best that science currently has to offer. And that, like this book, is very frustrating, and very sad.

Debbie says

I am sure that it is hard being a politician's child. You're forced into campaigning and projecting an image whether you want to or not. I have always liked George McGovern. He seemed like a compassionate guy. I'm sure he believes he did everything he could to help his daughter overcome her alcoholism. I also feel he probably worked harder to further his political career than he did to take care of his depressive wife and alcoholic son and daughter. McGovern seems defensive when he dismisses Terry's journal entries where she

reveals a painful childhood. No where in the book does he address how his wife's depression might have affected the children. He wants to believe that two of his children became alcoholics only because of genetics. I suspect that there is more to Terry's story than McGovern was willing to face.

Lisa Bertagnoli says

The book is most effective when he reprints entries from Terry's diary and from the logs at her various treatment facilities. Four stars for writing and clarity but five for bravery: I would call this a must-read for anyone trying to understand the monster that is alcohol addiction.

Laverne says

Such a tragic story but George McGovern does as much as can be done to keep from making it a downer. As you read the story it is interesting that the people suffering this disease are no different than you and I except they cannot have a drink of alcohol. One of her sisters said "She has been spoken of as a cheeful person full of jokes and laughter. She was also known to be aggressive and biting." I know lots of people like that who do not need to drink??! She tried so hard, as I think lots of people with addiction issues try, to overcome them. It is hard to imagine what the family felt that she died as she did.

Homeschoolmama says

I picked this book up at a library sale. I just might donate it back. The title suggests that the book is about McGovern's daughter Terry, but I couldn't help but notice how many times political campaigns entered in. And name dropping. It became irritating pretty quick. As well as McGovern's many parenthetical phrases to turn the focus on himself. (*"in the primaries, all of which I won."*) McGovern's tone was defensive throughout the book: he repeatedly emphasized how the disease of alcoholism is genetic, how it has little to do with emotional upsets in childhood-the depression, chaos and self destruction therein is explained by the alcoholism itself. Cart before the horse, in my opinion. Somehow, McGovern convinces himself that his and Eleanor's upbringing had little or nothing to do with his daughter Terry's problems. The former senator and his wife quickly ushered Terry, pregnant and at the tender age of 15, out of state to have an illegal abortion. But, heck, no this didn't have anything to do with her later self destructive behaviors. His many many days, months, years, on the campaign and lecture circuit also didn't have anything to do with it. He virtually ignored his wife's postpartum depression as well, expecting her to bear the brunt of raising five children, even having her drive them cross country, while he finished up a press conference. Five young kids! I found his arguments faulty, his reasoning inconsistent, his lack of insight appalling and his whole tone arrogant and self serving. I wish someone else had written this book. A journalist who would have interviewed more people, someone who would not have discounted Terry's own entries from her diaries *"Terry exaggerated her sister's jealousies."* I felt so bad for Terry. She got a raw deal. Even after her tragic death.

Jen, Jenny, Jennifer says

I've had this on my list for several years, but given I also have this disease sometimes reading rough tales of

alcoholism sans solution can mess with me. That said, the final 20 pages made it worthwhile. McGovern (yes, the political one) began the tale of his daughter's life with her death...in a sloshed stupor on Dec. 14, 1994, she fell into a Madison, Wisconsin, snowbank & froze to death. Reviewing her life, McGovern tells of the myriad treatments, the endless relapses, the harms done to self & others. Much of the book reaked of enabling, but in the last 20 pages McGovern dug into the solution that so many people have found. Recovery is hard & messy & painful & ugly...and what does it get you? A 24-hour reprieve. At one time in her life, Terry had 8 years of sobriety. McGovern shows what happens when we forget to do the daily things that got us sober in the first place.

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Wendy Seles Shelton says

A fascinating story of a daughter's journey through alcoholism. Despite the gripping subject matter, I felt the book was written in a detached manner, lacking emotion.

Chris C says

This is a tough book to even think about. My 40 yr old sister has mental illness & substance abuse issues. My siblings and I get so frustrated with my parents for constantly rescuing her from every mess she gets herself into. This situation has destroyed our family. I remind my family about Terry McGovern's death in a snowbank and how guilty her father feels. This book is a must read for any family in this situation.

Neil Mudde says

George McGovern wrote a very touching book, as a Father of a Daughter Terry who was is an alcoholic. According to "the Big Book" published by AA, Alcoholism is a cunning and baffling disease even though the body cannot tolerate it, yet it craves alcohol. Addicts will get their fix no matter how, or care whom they hurt, it is a very selfish disease. It is an extremely sad story, of a sad life, about a person who did not want for anything, written by a Father who is searching for answers, and how much responsibility should he accept for this wasted life of a Daughter he dearly loved. I believe he could write until all paper supplies ran out. He nor his Wife or Family are not responsible for what happened to Terry.

Perhaps one day there will be a miracle non addictive medicine, right now I believe that total abstinence from alcohol as AA suggests is the only route to go. It is good to see that by writing the book Senator McGovern experienced some healing. Setting up a foundation specifically geared to alcoholism and the problem of relapses, for those who earnestly try to stay sober, is to be applauded.

Janet says

I found this to be an excellent account of a tragic situation. The extensive use of Terry's journals, and so her voice, add the element of having a person who ultimately died from alcoholism tell us what that is like. The

author's research and commentary on alcoholism and treatment for alcoholism are also excellent.

I've read reviews that criticize George McGovern's attempts to explain alcoholism and offer suggestions for treatment based on the fact that another of his children went on to die of the disease. I don't find that this takes away from his attempts. Alcoholism remains tragically difficult to understand, to treat and to recover from, and no book by an anguished father is going to change that.

The book is interesting and entertaining as much a book about a true tragedy can be. I know it has already helped many people see a problem in themselves or loved-ones, seek treatment and achieve the recovery that eluded Terry.

Colette Guerin says

Very sad. Written by a man in great pain. Spent 30 years being a codependent to his child's disease and still blames himself. I give him credit for writing an open raw book. He still sees his daughter as what she was before or what she could have been. She was not the loving mother or wonderful daughter or great friend. She was an alcoholic, probably severely depressed who self medicated but abused her daughters while drinking and placed them in dangerous situations. She blamed her family for all her problems and took no accountability and used her friends as way stations until they could no longer put up with her antics. The alcoholic will always tell you what you want to hear, maybe believing it themselves, but will continue down their path of not just self-destruction but mutual-destruction to all those who have ever cared about them for in the end they are vey self-involved people. Their low is always their low, you will find it has no part of the havoc it caused in the lives they touched. This book hit a little to close too home.
