



Wichita

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Lewis Chopik has just graduated from Columbia University. Having been dumped by his girlfriend and in flight from the pressures exerted by his ambitious professor father, Lewis returns to Wichita in search of respite at the home of his New-Ager mother, Abby. But when Abby picks Lewis up from the airport, she reveals that she's starting a storm-chasing business and indulging a polyamorous lifestyle. Another unexpected arrival is Seth, Lewis's bi-polar younger brother, who shows off a new tattoo on his chest: *In Loving Memory of Seth Chopik*.

Wichita Details

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From Reader Review Wichita for online ebook

Diane says

I, like other Goodreads readers, read this book because it got a good review in the New York Times. But it left me cold - a strange story about a totally dysfunctional family and their friends and lovers. Many of the reviews of this book praised the writing, but I found it fairly boring and the characters didn't interest me. In contrast to the New York Times, the review in the Kansas hometown paper called it boring and unrealistic. What am I and the Kansas reviewer missing.

Judith Johnson says

As someone who has dealt with mental illness in a loved one, I found this book to be both funny and heartbreakingly real. A vivid portrait of dealing with someone you love who is bipolar and unstable. A very depressing read, the ending is so unfinished. Nothing is neatly tied up - kind of messy like life. If you deal with mental illness or you just want to know what bipolar is like, I recommend this highly.

Tuck says

author is instructor at pratt institute (one of best library schools in usa), a bit wacky, slacker returns home to wichita after getting his bs degree (and being pressured hard by his dad and dad's family to get a phd) to take a break from uni. his little brother seth is quite a handful, his mom too is into polyamorous relationships and has one boyfriend living in the backyard in a tent and making designer psychedelics in the basement. slacker, lewis, is trying to decide what to do next, while also having the blues over being dumped by girlfriend and being worried about his little brother's mental health. not sure what to say about all this but that if it sounds crazy, modern, wacky, confused, and heartwarming, it's because it is. quite a lot of meth and pot consumed, some e too, and coke, but that is pretty typical if you live in the nice burbs of wichita. storm chasing too is typical and mom tries her hand at that as a business, with a new age slant, gaia like. a bit of a happy ending though so that was a surprise.

Sandra says

I loved Wichita, by Thad Ziółkowski. The characters in the book were totally believable...I know these people. The dialog was spot-on. The protagonist, Lewis, is in all of us. He's at a crossroad in his life and he doesn't know which road to take. Life is filled with detours and sometimes they lead to unpleasant destinations. Hopefully we learn a little bit about ourselves along the way. Excellent book.

Joe Canas says

3.5 stars. Decent story, good characterizations and unusual descriptions and turns of phrase. I did not deduct stars for the TONS of typos in this book, solely out of loyalty to the usually excellent publisher Europa Editions.

Shawn says

Sleight, indulgent tale of grief caused by a bi-polar sibling to a privileged insipid youth. Unfortunately told from the viewpoint of the asshole brother.

Jane says

Reviews of this book called it a "coming of age" novel. Some hated it, some loved it. Some even called it humorous; however, I do not find mental illness or drug use to be funny topics. The value of this book would only be in bringing mental health issues to the forefront so that more can be learned about them. In this case the mental health issue is the main character's brother who suffers from being bipolar. Many bipolar persons do turn to drug use, but at times I would be angry or frustrated by the drug use of other characters in the book and at the stupidity displayed which precipitated the actions leading to the tragic events in their lives, not to mention the fact that most of the characters remained oblivious to the fact that the drugs were a problem. But I suppose this is a realistic portrayal of what could or does happen under such circumstances.

Darrell Reimer says

Lewis Chopik is in a bad way. He's just graduated with a perfectly useless literary degree from Columbia, while his feminist ex-girlfriend has graduated to a more prestigious boyfriend — a tenured professor. With his ego and libido in ruins, Lewis accepts an invitation from his New Agey mother to stay at her house in Wichita for the summer, while she gets her tornado-chasing tour business up and running.

Lewis wonders just how prepared he is for the scene that awaits him in Wichita. But how, exactly, does a guy prepare himself to be around his bipolar younger brother Seth, their erotically supple mother and her many off-the-grid companions? There is no preparation for this scene; best just to dive head-first into the maelstrom, and hope for the best.

Thad Ziolkowski's picaresque first novel reads somewhat like a hybrid of early **Robert Stone** (*Dog Soldiers*) and **John Kennedy Toole** (*Confederacy Of Dunces*). There are plenty of off-color, wryly-observed misadventures to be had in *Wichita*, but the cold undertow of Seth's genuine struggles with mental illness keeps the larger narrative from eddying into counter-cultural farce. In this regard, Ziolkowski's writing puts me in mind of another contemporary: **Miriam Toews**. Readers of Ziolkowski's earlier book, ***On A Wave*** (the best coming-of-age surfing memoir to hit the shelves), recognize Seth as a fictive stand-in for Adam, the author's late younger brother, to whom the novel is dedicated. As with Toews, there is a creative acknowledgement of the surprise adventures that arise from a chemically beleaguered brain. Unlike Toews, Ziolkowski has no religious bogeyman to which he can pin the ghastly collapse that punctuates these bipolar episodes.

Ziolkowski's strikes me as the more poignant approach. As the tornado closes in on the small community of

off-beat but recognizable characters, the reader has to wonder if our society — or even our species — isn't possessed of a bipolar disorder. I mean, for Christ's sake: *we've gone and changed the weather*. Like Ziolkowski's tiny community in Wichita, we are lovable, contemptible agents of unmanageable change. What do we do — what can we do — in the face of the coming storm?

Josh says

“Wichita,” by Thad Ziolkowski, is one of the best coming of age novels I have read in some time. Its central character, Lewis Chopik, is complicated, flawed, stubborn and somewhat lost. Despite, or perhaps because of those qualities, he somehow remains immensely likeable and relatable. “Wichita” serves as a great example of an author knowing how to weave humor, drama, tension and tragedy empathetically among a motley cast of characters—each one the type to easily fall into stereotype, which the author thankfully avoids.

The story follows Lewis as he travels back to his mother’s house after graduating from Columbia University with no concrete plans for the future. A relaxing time home with his mother is what he seeks, but far from what he gets. Immediately upon his arrival, complications ensue between Lewis and his mother, his bipolar brother, his mother’s boyfriends and more. His prior determination to remain aloof from the intersecting personalities present in his mother’s home and her yard crumbles quickly and Lewis lets his family suck him right back into their squabbles and problems.

Lewis’ brother Seth stands out as the most fascinating and heartbreakingly character. His disease has ruined his life and caused friction and pain for everyone around him. At times, he seems to grasp this and truly desires to change. Other times, he seems hell-bent on swinging the wrecking ball that is Seth into as much as he can. Through it all, we see this yearning for acceptance from Lewis fight with his resentment at Lewis’ apparent ease in escaping Wichita. That resentment is evident in the relationship between Lewis and his mother as well.

Further complicating all of this is Lewis’ own resentment at his father and his father’s family. Lewis is stuck between one side of his family that feels he’s not good enough for them (due to his extended time spent in Wichita no doubt) and the other who doesn’t necessarily understand why he left them for New York City and another life. This back and forth is visceral, it’s messy, it’s fractious and for the reader it’s fascinating. Abby, Lewis’ mother is a lion of a woman with no idea what she wants to do or where to focus the strength and energy she has.

Towards Lewis, she feels like a stranger; towards Seth, she feels at times powerless to do anything but rein him in with as light a leash as she can and hope for the best. Lewis’ father Virgil, a university professor, is a man lost in his own intelligence. He is the perfect logical, grounded and out of touch foil for his ex-wife Abby’s earthy, emotional and flighty nature. Virgil has no idea what to do with or about Seth either, his one attempt to bring him to NYC a wholesale disaster. Lewis challenges Virgil in another way, displaying a lack of drive Virgil and his family find confusing and almost alien.

Rounding out this family is a cast of supporting characters that fleshes out a tight narrative involving Abby’s new storm chasing business. The parallels between chasing storms and Seth’s destructive nature, simultaneously subtle and eloquent, were a highlight for me. By the last pages, I was in tears. Ziolkowski brings his story to an emotional climax that manages resolution without tidy, neat corners. His book was one of the most welcome surprises I have read this year; I highly recommend for your summer reading list. It reads maybe too quickly, but if you bring “Wichita” to the beach, prepare to sit there longer than you planned. This is my ninth Europa this year.

Full disclosure: this book was sent by Europa as an advance copy, however not for review purposes.

Marion says

After spending a year next to my bed, and getting picked up once in a while for a few minutes, always to be put down with disappointment, this book is retiring to my "books to donate" shelf. Just didn't feel the love with this one.

Anntonette says

Honestly, I bought this book for the author's name and while I felt like the book got under my skin, it was a bit too dark a coming of age story for me. There were characters that reminded me of people I know and experiences that felt like things I had been through. . . enough to make the book feel strangely familiar. The author is able to create clever and entertaining characters -- obviously the author is smart and learned enough to play at being annoyingly pretentious, but with a sense of self-awareness that makes him (his characters?) endearing. The ending doesn't shock, but seems sadly inevitable -- and the events right before the ending of the book suck the life out of the characters. At the end, one doesn't feel much hope, even though the author tried to leave us some crumbs. The ending felt too dark to be true and I didn't appreciate being left in that space. It does say something about the power of this author to take me to such a depressed state, I suppose. Overall, I am glad that I read the book, but I won't save it on the shelf to read again someday.

Ed says

luxurious reading. dope. and meth are involved. obv when wichita is in the title.
perfect-o

Aaron (Typographical Era) says

Let's face it, whether we care to admit it or not, we've all got that one person in our family that we consider the black sheep of the bunch. You know the type, causes oodles of trouble wherever they go, generally loves to start a shit storm any chance they get. Maybe it's a sibling, or an uncle, or a distant cousin, but whoever they are, they're out there somewhere in each of our active family trees just waiting for their next opportunity. They might have real mental health issues or they might crave any type of attention, even that which is negative in nature. Hell, they may even like to stir up trouble for the fun of it just to kick back and watch how things play out. For the fictional Chopik family, this person is Seth.

He's unpredictable, swinging wildly from being the guy who makes life a living hell for those around him, introducing chaos at every turn, to one that recognizes and is acutely aware of the damaging effect his behavior has on his friends and loved ones and desperately wants to change. Medications like lithium have helped him to a point, but his heavy recreational drug use and lack of the ability to break free of familiar debilitating patterns trip Seth up and leave him trapped, doomed to inflict an endless cycle of love quickly followed by pain on those closest to him. His brother Lewis seems to take the brunt of his erratic behavior.

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Lindi says

Solid writing, great characters. Grief, drugs, dysfunctional family (are there any other kind?) buffet Lewis as he tries to find his bearings after college.

Liam says

I was more motivated to avoid incurring late fees at the library than I was to finish this book.
