
First, it concisely demonstrates how a parent may be blindsided by the discovery of their child’s mental illness, when Nuçi unexpectedly made a first ever serious suicide attempt, leading to his immediate subsequent hospitalization. Phillips offers a clear sighted view of her son’s early life and development, marked by the emergence of a sullen, social withdrawal during adolescence, hiding his deep underlying depression. Author Phillips carefully surveyed other family members characteristics to find possible genetic bases for her son’s apparent unshakable depression. She then reviewed the mixture of stable and turbulent years afterwards, when her son was unable to remain at a college in far off California, and eventually settled in at a college in his home state (Georgia) and seemed to find new friends as he pursued his emerging interests to become a professional musician. During this seemingly less turbulent period the family tried to provide Nuçi with ample growing room at the same time they tried to assure themselves that their son continued to take his psycho-tropic medicines and psychotherapy. Sadly, five years after his first attempt, Nuçi shot himself with a gun he never should have been able to acquire, given his earlier history of mental health problems.

Second, Phillips’ book details her early and later post-loss years when, two years after the death she developed a plan to establish a musicians’ performance space in Athens, Georgia, (the college town where her son lived at the time of his death) that would provide easy and quick access to psychotherapeutic resources for troubled youth. Now, more than 15 years after founding her organization, Nuçi’s Space, it has raised a million dollars, and helped hundreds of troubled youth gain quick access to empathic counselors, something that was not available for her own child in 1996. She even founded a survivor of suicide support group that helps suicide bereaved family members in the Athens Georgia vicinity. Phillips’ efforts are a good example of post-traumatic growth, of the kinds of positive things survivors can do after a loss, helping their own healing and promoting better mental health in their own communities, at the same time they honor the memory of their deceased loved one.

While this is a very positive and help offering book readers should apply caution when Phillips speculates on suicide causation conceptualizing it almost exclusively as being caused by depression. Suicidologists continue to debate the many diverging causes of suicide, emanating from many different mental illness sources besides depression,: e.g. schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depressive disorders, PTSD, social isolation, and aggravated from many social sources, child abuse histories, bullying, social humiliation,
economic dislocation, incarceration, substance abuse, among a broad array of other pre-disposing factors. Otherwise, this book is highly recommended.