Will’s Choice is a poignant, 316-page book targeted at suicide prevention and intervention written by Will’s mother, Gail Griffith. Both Ms. Griffith and Will, who was 17 at the time of his suicide attempt, suffer from chronic depression.

Ms. Griffith wrote her candid and painful memoir at the risk of exposing her son, his former girlfriend Megan, herself, and her family to stigma and shame. Her rationale for the book was, “to try to challenge the misguided notion that a person suffering from depression wants to die, and that there is nothing anyone can do about it.”

After Will’s suicide attempt, she felt she had descended into a “black hole of guilt and anxiety” because she had “failed him.” Whether you suffer from depression, are the parent of a child who does, or are a mental health professional, it is no hyperbole to state that all will benefit from this most compelling read.

Reliving her own bouts with depression, Griffith asserts that genetic predisposition plays a huge role in their depression. Knowing this, she reports, “I watched him with the intensity of a feral cat, always looking for signs of vulnerability, points of weakness – tiny markers that would point to depression.”

Will’s Choice follows the sequence of events from: Will’s suffering from major depression at the age of 17 when he was admitted to a psychiatric institute for one-week, through his hospitalization following his suicide attempt, to another 3 week stay at a psychiatric institute, and during his 10-month stay at a treatment center for adolescents. The book’s concentration lies in three areas:

1) her agonizing story of Will’s recovery following his suicide attempt;
2) her research, facts, statistics, studies and quotes; and
3) her inclusion of journal entries and letters written by Will and all the prominent people who had an impact on his recovery.

Ms. Griffith gives the reader glimpses into Will and Megan’s (his girlfriend at the time) personalities by printing their journal entries and letters.

These memoirs accentuate the couple’s battle with Will’s depression, their volatile relationship, as well as Megan’s graphic description of her need to self mutilate her body - how she does it and the pleasure derived as she watches the blood flow. Equally potent reading was Will’s journal entries of his first hospitalization, his suicide attempt, and an April 2001 entry where he sums up his failings.

I have no doubt that parents, teenagers and mental health professionals, will benefit greatly just from the wisdom and insight in this passage alone. Will’s Choice offers the following pertinent information for parents:

1) Invest your time and energy in finding the information you need to serve as your child’s advocate and then trust your judgment;
2) If you are willing to experiment until you get the dosage and formula right, chronic depression can be managed with medication and cognitive behavioral therapy;
3) Never allow your depressed child to administer his/her own medications;
4) For treatment to be successful, your child must communicate honestly and openly with his/her doctor. Everyone (parents, child and doctor) needs to be on board with the treatment regime;
5) The best thing you can say to the parent of a child who has survived a suicide attempt is, “How wonderful your child survived. Now you have a chance to fix the problem.”

Finally, Ms. Griffith writes that the advice given to her by professionals after Will’s suicide attempt was that he would be “at risk for a recurrent attempt” and that there was “not much intervention appropriate for teens.”

With this in mind she did extensive research and appropriately ends her book with a list of related resources. Thanks to Ms. Griffith’s sharing her knowledge, insight and vulnerabilities, Will’s Choice is bound to make an impact on how our society views mental illness and depression.