



The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness

By Elyn R. Saks

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The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness By Elyn R. Saks

Elyn Saks is a success by any measure: she's an endowed professor at the prestigious University of Southern California Gould School of Law. She has managed to achieve this in spite of being diagnosed as schizophrenic and given a "grave" prognosis--and suffering the effects of her illness throughout her life. Saks was only eight, and living an otherwise idyllic childhood in sunny 1960s Miami, when her first symptoms appeared in the form of obsessions and night terrors. But it was not until she reached Oxford University as a Marshall Scholar that her first full-blown episode, complete with voices in her head and terrifying suicidal fantasies, forced her into a psychiatric hospital. Saks would later attend Yale Law School where one night, during her first term, she had a breakdown that left her singing on the roof of the law school library at midnight. She was taken to the emergency room, force-fed antipsychotic medication, and tied hand-and-foot to the cold metal of a hospital bed. She spent the next five months in a psychiatric ward. So began Saks's long war with her own internal demons and the equally powerful forces of stigma. Today she is a chaired professor of law who researches and writes about the rights of the mentally ill. She is married to a wonderful man. In *The Center Cannot Hold*, Elyn Saks discusses frankly and movingly the paranoia, the inability to tell imaginary fears from real ones, and the voices in her head insisting she do terrible things, as well as the many obstacles she overcame to become the woman she is today. It is destined to become a classic in the genre.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this engrossing memoir, Saks, a professor of law and psychiatry at the University of Southern California, demonstrates a novelist's skill of creating character, dialogue and suspense. From her extraordinary perspective as both expert and sufferer (diagnosis: Chronic paranoid schizophrenia with acute exacerbation; prognosis: Grave), Saks carries the reader from the early little quirks to the full blown falling apart, flying apart, exploding psychosis. Schizophrenia rolls in like a slow fog, as Saks shows, becoming imperceptibly thicker as time goes on.- Along the way to stability (treatment, not cure), Saks is treated with a pharmacopeia of drugs and by a chorus of therapists. In her jargon-free style, she describes the workings of the drugs (getting med-free, a constant motif) and the ideas of the therapists and physicians (psychologist, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, cardiologist, endocrinologist). Her personal experience of a world in which she is both frightened and frightening is graphically drawn and leads directly to her advocacy of mental patients' civil rights as they confront compulsory medication, civil commitment, the abuse of restraints and the absurdities of the mental care system. She is a strong proponent of talk therapy (While medication had kept me alive, it had been psychoanalysis that helped me find a life worth living). This is heavy reading, but Saks's account will certainly stand out in its field.

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From [Booklist](#)

At eight years old, Saks began suffering hallucinations and obsessive fears of being attacked. An adolescent experimentation with drugs provoked her parents to enroll her in a drug treatment program. But Saks' incredible self-control masked the fact that she was suffering from a debilitating mental illness. By the time she entered graduate school at Oxford University, her symptoms were so severe—including full-blown psychotic episodes and suicidal fantasies—that she was hospitalized. Through Oxford, law school at Yale, and a move to Los Angeles to work in the law school of the University of California, Saks struggled mightily to balance her ambitions with her illness, which was eventually diagnosed as schizophrenia. Never wanting to concede to her mental illness, Saks finds calm and comfort in a rigorous work routine. An analyst characterized her as having three lives: as Elyn, as Professor Saks, and as the Lady of the Charts mental patient. As Saks battled to get off medication and leave behind the Lady of the Charts, she fought for the rights of mental patients, and came to terms with her own limitations. Bush, Vanessa

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Review

"It is the most lucid and hopeful memoir of living with schizophrenia I have ever read."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Neil Calvert:

This The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness usually are reliable for you who want to become a successful person, why. The key reason why of this The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness can be among the great books you must have is actually giving you more than just simple reading food but feed an individual with information that probably will shock your preceding knowledge. This book

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Dale Moore:

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John Stewart:

Is it a person who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day by simply watching television programs or just lying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness can be the solution, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this brand new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

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