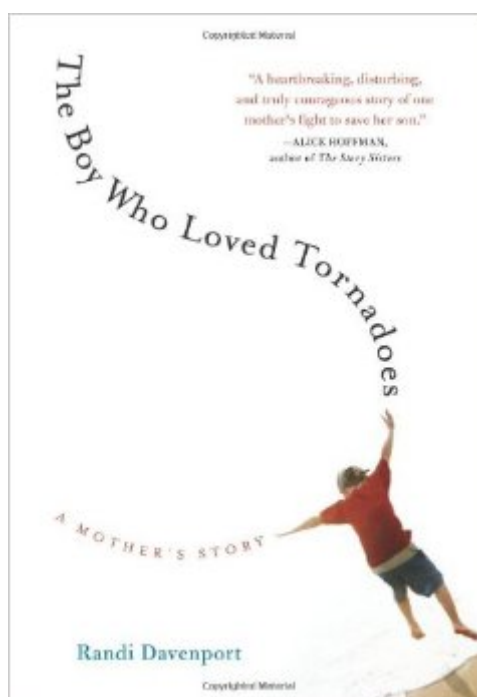


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# The Boy Who Loved Tornadoes



## Synopsis

Randi Davenport's story is a testament to human fortitude, to hope, and to a mother's uncompromising love for her children. She had always worked hard to provide her family with a sense of stability and strength, despite the challenges of having a son with autism and a husband whose erratic behavior sometimes puzzled and confused her. But eventually, Randi's husband slipped into his own world and permanently out of her family's. And at fifteen, her son Chase entered an unremitting psychosis—pursued by terrifying images, unable to recognize his own mother, unwilling to eat or even talk—becoming ever more tortured and unreachable. Beautifully written and profoundly moving, this is the heartbreaking yet triumphant story of how Randi Davenport navigated the byzantine and broken health care system and managed not just to save her son from the brink of suicide but to bring him back to her again, and make her family whole. In *The Boy Who Loved Tornadoes*, she gives voice to the experiences of countless families whose struggles with mental illness are likewise invisible to the larger world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When I picked up this book, intending to simply glance through the first few pages, I found myself instantly drawn into Dr. Randi Davenport's finely spun world, and was unable to put the book down until I had finished it. Riveting, painful, and, ultimately, inspiring, this is an incredible book. It is a story worth telling, as well as a story well told. Davenport has found the courage to chronicle her son's illness without any melodramatic embellishments or overwrought appeals to the reader. Her

story is told in a frank, stark, and oddly beautiful style that at once makes her overwhelming love for her children plain, though she does not attempt to paint herself as a heroine or as anything other than a mother struggling to do the best for her kids in an impossible situation. I have read many memoirs in which forgettable writing is made up for by an interesting story, and others in which a rather boring, ordinary narrative is rendered memorable through the use of skilled writing. This falls into neither of those categories. *The Boy Who Loves Tornadoes* is one of those rare memoirs in which a truly captivating story is brought to life by a talented writer. Davenport's prose is spare, gorgeous, and incredibly affecting. This moving story of her son's illness, her daughter's sadness, and the disintegration of their family plays out like a feature film, with characters so well drawn that they appear in the reader's head. The structure of the book pulls the reader along like a pair of speeding trains, with scenes from the present interspersed with memories from the past, until the two timelines crash together and create one heartbreakingly clear picture of a child in crisis.

I can't truthfully say that I've read all that many memoirs in my life; I've read fewer still about families coping with mental illness. That said, Davenport's book stands tall not just as an historical record of her family's nearly unimaginable struggles, but as a creative work written with an ability to construct an almost literary structure, framing the events in an emotional and chronological span that encompasses multiple lives, decades, and locations. Because of Davenport's skill as a writer, "*The Boy Who Loved Tornadoes*" encompasses not just the primary story at hand, but Davenport's own experiences growing up as an aspiring poet (including the common tendency among poets to glorify mental illness as a divine state), her perceptions of mental illness, and the struggle to make sense of the chemical and psychological tethers that bind her son, Chase, and baffle caregivers at all levels of the medical community. Her cross-country travels as a professor, the dissolution of a failed marriage, and her attempts to simulate a normal life (even when none seemed possible) with her daughter, Haley, as well as her struggles against a health care system that constant seeks loopholes in order to push the most difficult patients (who are, by default, those also in the most need of care) out into a nearby alley imbues the true-life story with rich, complex emotions and situations. At times, the book reads like an especially intense one-act play between two players; at other times, gentle memories or sly asides evoke not just the low moments, but also the flickering moments of relief and clarity. Far from maudlin, the book is written by an author with a gift for (and love of) language that dissects fleeting, intangible emotions and delivers them to the reader in a very comprehensible way.

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