



A Lethal Inheritance: A Mother Uncovers the Science Behind Three Generations of Mental Illness

Victoria Costello

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From the review of A LETHAL INHERITANCE by Dean MacKinnon, MD of Johns Hopkins Medical School: "In journalistic reviews of the scientific literature I always look out for the odd bit of pseudoscience or pop psychology that might undermine one's confidence in the author's understanding of the topic. Happily, I find that Ms. Costello's science and medical reporting, on topics both biological and clinical, is quite sound. Indeed, she not only avoids bad science, but she also avoids gushing overenthusiastically about the trendiest, most evanescent discoveries. I was consistently impressed with her scholarship and her way of making sense of science without resorting to jargon. She even goes the extra mile--late in the book she enrolls in a study on psychobiological markers of schizophrenia and describes the research process from the inside out."

From the book foreword by Terrie Moffitt, PhD Professor of Neuroscience, Kings College London, Institute of Psychiatry, and Duke University

Every family has secrets; only some secrets are lethal. In Victoria Costello's family mental illness had been given many names over at least four generations until this inherited conspiracy of silence finally endangered the youngest members of the family, her children.

In this riveting story--part memoir, detective story, and scientific investigation--in the tradition of the story of *Henrietta Lacks*, Costello recounts how the mental unraveling of her seventeen-year-old son Alex compelled her to look back into family history for clues to his condition. Eventually she tied Alex's descent into hallucinations and months of shoeless wandering on the streets of Los Angeles to his great grandfather's suicide on a New York City railroad track in 1913.

But this insight brought no quick relief. Within two years of Alex's diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, both she and her youngest son succumbed to two different mental disorders: major depression and anxiety disorder. Costello depicts her struggle to get the best possible mental health care for her sons and herself, treatment that ultimately brings each of them to full recovery. In the process, she discovers startling new neuroscience and genetic findings that explain how clusters of mental illness traverse family generations.

The author closes by translating what she's learned into a set of ground rules for "New, New Parenting," advice to help individuals and families recover from addictions and mental disorders, and prevent their return in future generations.

Writing for Booklist, Donna Chavez says about *A Lethal Inheritance*: "Science journalist Costello's educative memoir gives poignant testimony to the fact that not only do we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us; we carry their burdens as well. At the point where it was almost too late to intervene in her eldest son's mental deterioration, Costello embarked on a journey backward in time that moved her and both of her sons forward into a brighter future. ...The story Costello share is a twofer. It is a cautionary tale about the price families pay for keeping mental illness secret. It is also a road map for identifying risk factors for and recognizing early signs of psychiatric issues, the better to preempt advanced disease."

To see the Book Trailer for A Lethal Inheritance, go to:
youtube.com/watch?v=naB8JzT9hQU

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