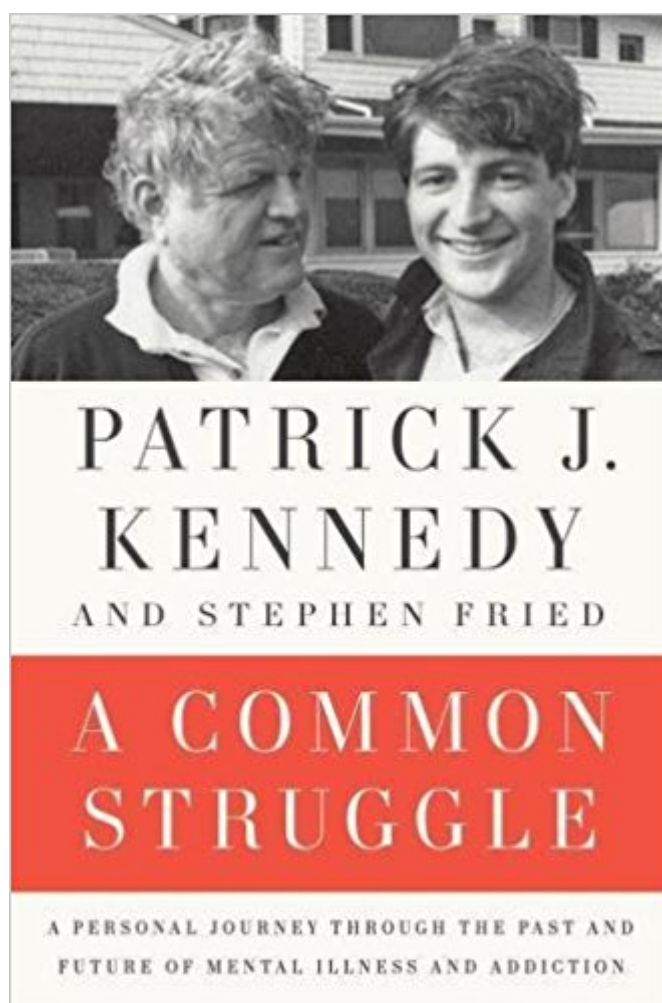


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# A Common Struggle: A Personal Journey Through The Past And Future Of Mental Illness And Addiction



## Synopsis

**\*\*A New York Times Bestseller\*\*** Patrick J. Kennedy, the former congressman and youngest child of Senator Ted Kennedy, details his personal and political battle with mental illness and addiction, exploring mental health care's history in the country alongside his and every family's private struggles. On May 5, 2006, the New York Times ran two stories, "Patrick Kennedy Crashes Car into Capitol Barrier" and then, several hours later, "Patrick Kennedy Says He'll Seek Help for Addiction." It was the first time that the popular Rhode Island congressman had publicly disclosed his addiction to prescription painkillers, the true extent of his struggle with bipolar disorder and his plan to immediately seek treatment. That could have been the end of his career, but instead it was the beginning. Since then, Kennedy has become the nation's leading advocate for mental health and substance abuse care, research and policy both in and out of Congress. And ever since passing the landmark Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act--and after the death of his father, leaving Congress--he has been changing the dialogue that surrounds all brain diseases. *A Common Struggle* weaves together Kennedy's private and professional narratives, echoing Kennedy's philosophy that for him, the personal is political and the political personal. Focusing on the years from his 'coming out' about suffering from bipolar disorder and addiction to the present day, the book examines Kennedy's journey toward recovery and reflects on Americans' propensity to treat mental illnesses as "family secrets." Beyond his own story, though, Kennedy creates a roadmap for equality in the mental health community, and outlines a bold plan for the future of mental health policy. Written with award-winning healthcare journalist and best-selling author Stephen Fried, *A Common Struggle* is both a cry for empathy and a call to action.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A stunningly unvarnished portrait of one of America's most private public families..."--People  
Searching and fearless." --Kevin Cullen, The Boston Globe  
"I, am personally, really proud of Patrick. I think what he's doing is consistent with everything that my family has stood for...he needed to start that journey by telling his own story of mental illness. I think it's noble, and it's heroic, and I have nothing but admiration for him."  
--Robert F. Kennedy Jr. on "Ring of Fire" radio  
"[Patrick Kennedy] has undeniably turned his fame toward a good cause • of raising understanding about the prevalence of mental illness and addiction in our society, and the need to help our brothers and sisters who cannot help themselves. There are easier ways to make money than speaking out honestly about one's own life, and we admire the courage Mr. Kennedy has shown in discussing these difficult issues." --Editorial Board, Providence Journal  
"Fascinating ... This book is a must-read, not only for those suffering from mental health and substance use disorders, but also for the professionals who treat them and for those who pay for that treatment."--Dr. George Koob, Director National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Clinical Psychiatry News  
"Kennedy's eye-opening book is a public call for action. "A Common Struggle" also is a call for understanding, not only for those with mental illness, but for all those affected by the mostly misunderstood, and often devastating, illness. As Kennedy points out, no one is immune from mental illness." --Wichita Times  
"His new memoir, which recounts the troubles he and his famous family experienced, will help move the needle when it comes to public policy regarding mental health and substance abuse.... it shine[s] a needed light on a serious problem."  
--Editorial Board, The Oklahoman  
"If your readers do nothing else today, they should buy or order this remarkable book ... I always admired Kennedy's passion and willingness to fight not only on mental illness issues but also such topics as gay rights and gun control. This book should enhance your understanding and appreciation of the work he did in Congress and the ambitious mental health initiatives he is leading now. And for the happiness of his marriage and fatherhood..."  
--Charlie Bakst, on WPRI TV blog  
"I think Patrick Kennedy is quite courageous for bringing this book out. ... What he is doing is really the equivalent of what Betty Ford did when she exposed her own alcoholism."--Dr. Thomas McLelland, former deputy director of the White House Office of

National Drug Control Policy, on MSNBC "Patrick Kennedy should receive a profile in courage award for his book, "A Common Struggle..."-- Dan Rea, CBS-TV Boston

The Honorable Patrick J. Kennedy is a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives and the nation's leading political voice on mental illness, addiction, and other brain diseases. During his 16-year career representing Rhode Island in Congress, he fought a national battle to end medical and societal discrimination against these illnesses, highlighted by his lead sponsorship of the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act of 2008--and his brave openness about his own health challenges. The son of Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy, he decided to leave Congress not long after his father's death to devote his career to advocacy for brain diseases and to create a new, healthier life and start a family. He has since founded the Kennedy Forum, which unites the community of mental health, and co-founded One Mind for Research, which sponsors brain research and open science collaboration. He lives in New Jersey with his wife, Amy, and their four children. [www.patrickjkennedy.net](http://www.patrickjkennedy.net)

Stephen Fried is an award-winning magazine journalist, a best-selling author and an adjunct professor at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He is the author of two books on healthcare, mental health and addiction--Bitter Pills: Inside the Hazardous World of Legal Drugs and Thing of Beauty: The Tragedy of Supermodel Gia--as well as The New Rabbi, Husbandry and his recent historical biography Appetite for America: Fred Harvey and the Business of Civilizing the Wild West--One Meal at a Time, which was a New York Times bestseller. Fried lives in Philadelphia with his wife, author Diane Ayres. [www.stephenfried.com](http://www.stephenfried.com)

Patrick Kennedy grew up in a household that didn't talk about 'the elephants in the room.' (Referring to apolitical elephants.) Divorce, mother's drinking, father's drinking, bipolar disorder, depression and substance abuse - all swept under the rug. Patrick, while still a Representative in Congress, decided to admit his latest problem - a minor crash while driving DUI. For that he received condemnation from his father, Senator Ted Kennedy, but it was the first step towards taking control of his life. Nearly one in four Americans are personally affected by mental illness and addiction every day, and one-third of all U.S. hospital stays involve those diseases. Patrick since left Congress, married, and has devoted his life to encouraging better funding of mental health care and encouraging others to confront their mental health problems. During that time, Patrick and Senator Kennedy helped pass the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act in 2008, and the Affordable Care Act has made it illegal to cover mental illness, addiction, and intellectual disabilities differently

than other medical conditions. The 'bad news' is that they couldn't begin to be fully enforced until 7/1/2014 because of court challenges and delays in rule-making.'A Common Struggle' begins in 1988 - Patrick's back is hurting, he'd already been in rehab for cocaine use during his senior year in prep school. He also suffered from asthma, depression and anxiety. Then they found a tumor on his spinal cord. Most would have taken this news as a disaster. Patrick, however, welcomed it - now his illness would be taken as seriously and sympathetically as cancer. (Luckily, it was a benign tumor.) Turns out the Kennedy family had more than its share of greatness and personal tragedy. The latter included Patrick's aunt Rose - born during WWI with a developmental disability, specifics unknown. Then in her late teens/early 20s, she also developed psychiatric problems. Her father, Joseph Kennedy Sr. chose to have her treated with an extreme new procedure - a lobotomy. This dramatically worsened the effects of her original brain damage, and he never forgave himself for taking that path. Patrick's mother inherited her own mother's alcoholism, his father suffered from PTSD, and back pain arising from a small plane crash in 1964. Patrick's cousin David died of an overdose prior to reaching age 30. His brother Teddy went into rehab. Three of Bobby Kennedy's 11 children have had public issues with drugs. Jean Kennedy's son, William Kennedy Smith, was accused of drunkenly raping a woman after returning home from a bar. And Patrick went through innumerable rehabs, counseling/'rent-a-friend' sessions, and medication - mostly for mental issues, but also involving severe asthma. Patrick's father, Senator Ted Kennedy, reportedly turned to drink following the assassinations of his brothers John F. and Robert F. within a five year period. (His fatal Chappaquiddick crash in 1969, however, was suspected to have involved alcohol. In 1964 he'd been in a small plane crash that reportedly left the young senator with back pain.) Discussing the two murders/brothers was avoided. In 1991, Patrick, his siblings, and others had an intervention for Ted. Unfortunately, he reacted negatively and walked out. Then he wrote Patrick a letter and told him to not visit anymore, at least for the time being. Patrick first became drunk at the age of ten, during his father's first diplomatic trip to China. In prep school, Patrick's drinking and drug use became worse - he ended up graduating behind his class, then went to Georgetown University, lasting only a few weeks. Somehow he managed to get elected to the Rhode Island legislature, and then Congress. A major CDC/Kaiser study found strong correlations between maltreatment as a child and subsequent mental illness - however, it also showed that bad parenting can't turn someone schizophrenic or bipolar. Those maladies are transmitted genetically. Patrick contends Reagan's slashing funding for addiction treatment and education, an over-focus on quashing the supply of illegal drugs, and Nancy's 'Just Say No' inadvertently became one of the most destructive and stigmatizing actions in the mental health field. (What do other nations do, and how successful

are their approaches?)The bulk of the remainder of the book recounts various family addiction incidences.

An uncommon book, a bold story, beautifully written. A compelling and at times harrowing read for anyone who has had a mental health or addiction issue, or known someone who has--which is nearly everyone.

Milly and I read this book through without stopping. Finally, our eyes wet we had to stop and cry. We are not Kennedy family "camp followers", but, our lives have intertwined with Ted's virtually from our beginnings. Bob first encountered Ted Kennedy in the fall of 1944 as a boarding student at The Fessenden School, which Patrick later attended; Ted helped Bob on several occasions, and maybe I helped him; we have met and enjoyed the company of Patrick and Amy in recent times. Patrick and Bob share a patrilineal Irish ancestry with the forenames of John Patrick and both of whom settled and prospered in Boston. So, following the Kennedy family over seventy years has been both joy and a virtual obsession. Think for a minute of this primogeniture conscious family close your eyes and think again. Patrick is the youngest child of the youngest child of JP. As the bible would have it listen to the children. This book is terrifying in exposing the fragility of Patrick's time on earth. And yet, he was driven by a sense of mission and the need to expose to the sentient world the realities of mental illness and the need for society and government to devote its prime resources to what he describes as the dysfunctions of the "brain". He has been exposed to all of the well-meaning therapies of the couch and the pill. They didn't kill him, but the book is a route map for miseries confidently administered. Ultimately, the book describes how he somewhere acquired the confidence to try it on his own. Finally, he addresses the principal problem everyone who is exposed to the illnesses of addiction and the mind is reluctant to talk about it; everyone who is parent of a child with these problems is ashamed of their inability to help their offspring; every individual who is "mentally ill" wants to be different. No one wants to talk about it. We are trying. Patrick has devoted himself to the task. This book should be one of the founding documents of a new human enlightenment about mental illness; by describing his family's illnesses, Patrick liberates all the rest of us; we should not be ashamed to recognize that the problem exists for us and to commit ourselves to doing something about it. In brief, this is a really important book. The

sooner the more people read it, the closer our society will be to addressing these critical problems of the human condition. Millicent and Bob Monks, Cape Elizabeth, ME.

I thought this book frank, straight forward and heartfelt. The knowledge imparted about mental diseases was enlightening. I'm a bit stunned that a major review source (Kirkus Reviews) has not mentioned the book either as a recent release or review. I am a subscriber and depend on that publication for professional reviews. At any rate, I am pleased to have found Kennedy's book by watching an interview with him on MSNBC's Morning Joe show. Having just lost a sibling because of his mental disabilities, I now understand more about the double tragedy of those born with mental disabilities. They often develop the typical mental disorders (Bipolarism, anxiety disorders, etc.) which appear in the teen and early adult years. These are the people least able to cope with such conditions. I only wish my parents had paid more attention and sought help rather than suffer in shame. But now, I see, that parents not discussing or acknowledging mental disabilities is typical across the general population. Now, I feel obliged to set aside the anger I have harbored for so many years. Thank you, Patrick Kennedy!

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