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January First: A Child's Descent Into Madness And Her Father's Struggle To Save Her



Synopsis

Michael Schofield's daughter January is at the mercy of her imaginary friends, except they aren't the imaginary friends that most young children have; they are hallucinations. And January is caught in the conflict between our world and their world, a place she calls Calalini. Some of these hallucinations, like 24 Hours, are friendly and some, like 400 the Cat and Wednesday the Rat, bite and scratch her until she does what they want. They often tell her to scream at strangers, jump out of buildings, and attack her baby brother. At six years old, January Schofield, to her family, was diagnosed with schizophrenia, one of the worst mental illnesses known to man. What's more, schizophrenia is 20 to 30 times more severe in children than in adults and in January's case, doctors say, she is hallucinating 95 percent of the time that she is awake. Potent psychiatric drugs that would level most adults barely faze her. A New York Times bestseller, January First captures Michael and his family's remarkable story in a narrative that forges new territory within books about mental illness. In the beginning, readers see Janni's incredible early potential: her brilliance, and savant-like ability to learn extremely abstract concepts. Next, they witness early warning signs that something is not right, Michael's attempts to rationalize what's happening, and his descent alongside his daughter into the abyss of schizophrenia. Their battle has included a two-year search for answers, countless medications and hospitalizations, allegations of abuse, despair that almost broke their family apart and, finally, victories against the illness and a new faith that they can create a life for Janni filled with moments of happiness. A compelling, unsparing and passionate account, January First vividly details Schofield's commitment to bring his daughter back from the edge of insanity. It is a father's soul-baring memoir of the daily struggles and challenges he and his wife face as they do everything they can to help Janni while trying to keep their family together.

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Customer Reviews

I wanted to like this book. I truly did. After seeing a documentary about Jani, the daily struggles of a schizophrenic child piqued my interest. But, sadly, the father's ego and sense of entitlement got in the way of her story. His self-aggrandizing position of superiority above those around him and dozens of inconsistencies in his actions proved to be too much to stomach: His description of his daughter is akin to viewing her as a science experiment, and yet he seems truly amazed that despite her "genius" she wants to be a normal child. It's sad that I know Jani's IQ (stated as a nauseum throughout the book, to the point of embarrassment) but not HER hopes and dreams. My heart goes out to poor Jani. While Mr. Schofield clearly loves her, he has yet to realize that gifted intelligence is by no means unique to his daughter. Jani's aggression is well-documented throughout the book, yet consistent discipline is presented as a 'novel' concept towards the end of the book, only after a therapist suggested they not give in to a five year old's demands. Seriously? One might question whether some of her behavioral issues could have been curtailed with parenting 101 - don't negotiate with a toddler. The family insists on keeping a dog, despite repeated attempts by Jani to harm or attack the poor animal. Worse, the father and mother at various points in the story feel compelled to include Jani on walks and during play. The father describes ongoing beatings, but as a teacher at a local college, makes no mention of whether inevitable bruising from such forceful blows would cause others to raise questions. Seems odd that bloody lips, scratches, and kicks wouldn't be noticed.

I'm going to have to agree with most of the other reviewers. I picked this book up at the library with an interest in learning more about Jani's situation. What I got was her father's self-entitled, egotistical, and delusional downward spiral instead. Don't get me wrong. This is a very interesting

read and I finished it in two days, but the further I got, the more I realized I was only enveloped in watching a train wreck. You might think I'm referring to Jani. Nope. First, I can't imagine how difficult it must be to raise a child with schizophrenia. I can't fault the parents for the things they royally screwed up on because no single parent is EVER prepared to handle what they handled. However, the way Michael demonizes his wife is complete bull. For 90% of the book, Michael paints himself as the model parent. He writes as if he is the only one who cares about Jani while his wife is just an exasperated flake. Everyone is the enemy and he's the only one who understands Jani. He complains about how his wife doesn't understand or help yet he gives no indication of ever acknowledging how much she shared the burden of raising a child with mental illness. People handle stress differently and the fact that Michael's interpretation of that is "handle it my way or you're handling it wrong" says loads about why he felt so out of control. One particular sentence that seemed to sum up my assumption about his one-man-army mentality perfectly is when he mentions the conception of Bohdi. When Michael and Susan were seeking friends for Jani and failing, they decided that maybe a sibling is what she needed. However, Michael's words were, "If I couldn't find her a friend, I'd create one for her." Not "we".

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