



The Girl Behind the Door: A Father's Journey Into the Mystery of Attachment

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A Marin County, California father embarks on a journey to understand what led his seventeen-year-old daughter, Casey, to take her life. He travels back to her abandonment at birth and adoption from a Polish orphanage at fourteen months, through her happy childhood and her turbulent adolescence, searching for answers. In most respects, Casey was a perfectly normal girl – beautiful, smart and popular, accepted at an elite college. But she also had troubling behaviors that no one understood, including mental health professionals.

His search leads to a condition known as attachment disorder, an affliction common among children who have been abandoned, neglected or abused.

It explained everything.

The Girl Behind the Door: A Father's Journey Into the Mystery of Attachment Details

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From Reader Review *The Girl Behind the Door: A Father's Journey Into the Mystery of Attachment* for online ebook

Everydayreader1 says

John and Erika Brooks experienced a parent's worst nightmare, when their seventeen-year-old daughter, Casey, jumped from the Golden Gate Bridge and took her own life. He shares Casey's and their family's story so that others may benefit from the tragedy.

This book is a candid telling of their story. Poignant and heartbreaking, and yet filled with love for his daughter. I wanted to read it because I have long been interested in how the experiences of childhood translate into who we are as adults. And, how and why seemingly insignificant events can often stay with us our entire lives. I am richer for having read this book.

Beth Lind says

Oh wow. This is a gut wrenching and painfully honest story of a family who realized too late that their adopted daughter likely suffered from attachment disorder. As parents, there is no one right answer and we all plod along trying our best, sometimes we get it right and sometimes we don't. I think this book has the potential to change mindsets and practices of how we adopt children (especially children adopted from orphanages).

I couldn't put this book down and it is weighing heavy on my mind.

John Brooks, I think what you and your wife did for Casey was amazing. I'm sorry you lost her but maybe your memoir will help others understand the confusing and devastating behaviors associated with attachment issues. Thank you for sharing your story.

Kate says

Devastating. I'm also curious what percent of adoptees (from regular adoptions not orphanages) have a degree of attachment disorder.

LucidStyle says

This was a quick read, first because the life stories disclosed are so accessible and real. Second, because the author's candor was disarming. Parenting is hard: Trying to understand children growing up in a continually modern world, our generation-old tools are never adequate to fully comprehend or deal with their needs – if we ever have the luxury of identifying them. The father in this book took the time in processing and sharing his story and personal experiences, to illustrate just how easy it is to get lost in the power struggles within individual battles rather than focusing on the goal of winning the war. Not that parenting should be a battle or a war – the longer parents are parents, the more they (hopefully) tend to see that this “war” isn't a violent

brawl between divergent ideologies. It's more, or should be more, similar to two divergent parties on thick and overgrown jungle paths, attempting to clear away a view toward true purpose and deep meaning in life. Eventually, parents and child converge on this path, heading always as they'll discover, in the same ultimate direction. Sadly, that eventuality never came for John and Erika, the loving and now pained parents in this book.

This book is so important for parents and any professional who works with children and teens. We need to take off our blinders and to dispel our need for control so that we might look to possible unseen contributors to children's distress, whether their symptoms indicate normal or special needs. Trauma of any form can deeply impact a child and lead to severe issues later in life. A primary message this book has to offer, beyond the hidden impact of adoption and theories on attachment in children, is that our time is very short with our children, and that they are indeed vulnerable: Love them unconditionally.

Ana says

Once again, my predilection for bereavement memoirs has gotten me into trouble, as I am faced, again, with the task of digesting the tale of someone's loss and assigning it a numerical rating. However, I don't think I can do that with this book: I think *The Girl Behind The Door* is going to be the first book I've read since I joined Goodreads that I can't give a rating out of five stars.

I've mentioned this before on my Goodreads account, but for a couple of (personal) reasons I find myself inexorably drawn to book about the process of grieving; books I've reviewed here before that fit into that genre are *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and *Blue Nights*. Granted, I did have hesitations with those books about how to evaluate their literary merit in light of the subject matter, but on a fundamental level, in books like that, people like Didion and Eggers are writers first and witnesses to their own personal tragedies second. Yes, the telling of these tales is an act of catharsis - but, consciously or not, they both still try to produce a work with artistic merit: I was ultimately able to give those works ratings based on how they succeeded or failed in that regard.

The Girl Behind The Door is different. It's not that Brooks isn't a competent writer - or even a good one: it's just very evident that he isn't trying to achieve literary success with this book. He's trying to achieve catharsis; he's also trying to speak to other families that have gone through similar things, and specifically to raise awareness of attachment disorders. *The Girl Behind The Door* spoke to me, it touched me, and I am glad that I picked it up. I'd encourage others to read it. I just don't know that I can tell you how much I "enjoyed" it - because I don't think you're supposed to.

Taylor Sphapmixay says

How must a parent react to their child's suicide, especially if the child's death is on their hands? The novel *The Girl Behind the Door* by John Brooks takes place in San Francisco and includes realistic characters and events. It revolves around a mystery as to why their daughter committed suicide and explains the toxic relationship between child and parent. In the novel, the narrator is the father of the child and throughout the story he explains his thoughts and feelings towards his daughter's unhealthy behavior and suicide. I really enjoyed this book, it is a very sensitive topic that not many mainstream media talk about but I believe that this topic should be expressed more in today's society.

The story begins with the event of Casey's suicide. Casey left a note for her parents apologizing and saying

that she was at the Golden Gate Bridge, where she jumped and killed herself. After her father finds out that his daughter died, the novel flashes back to the process of him and his wife, Erika, adopting Casey in a Polish Orphanage. Throughout the novel her father explains the events of his parenting experience and the growth of Casey. When she was a toddler she often had temper tantrums and her behavior was harmful to herself and her parents. As she grew up these tantrums and fits became worse and frequent. Her parents constantly have to deal with this bad behavior and no matter what they do, whether that is punishing her or talking to her calmly, these tantrums never ended. Having this behavior affected Casey's academics and relationship with her parents, causing her to smoke and use drugs. Everyday in their household consisted of a battle between Casey and her parents.

I give this book a five out of five stars. John Brooks did an amazing job with the layout of the novel and the topic is something that I enjoy learning. The psychological meaning behind the story is very touching and deep which is what kept me engaged into it. Even though I have not experienced these events in the novel, I do enjoy learning about the human behavior and the therapeutic environment that the author provides me. When I get older I dream of caring for people with mental health and hopefully become a therapist, this book helps me understand why some people may behave in a certain way. Something I would like to know is how does Casey's father move on and what does the future hold for him and his wife? John Brooks novel, *The Girl Behind the Door*, is one of my favorite books so far.

Esil says

The Girl Behind the Door was doubly sad and heartbreaking. John Brooks and his wife Erika adopted a Polish orphan in the early 1990s when she was around 10 months old. They renamed her Casey, and brought her to live an upper middle class life in the Bay Area in California. The book opens with Casey's suicide at the age of 17, when she jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge. Throughout the rest of this memoir, Brooks recounts their tumultuous life with Casey from the time they brought her home -- her intelligence, wicked wit, intense mood swings, tantrums, insecurity, inconsistent academic performance, sporadic drug use, etc... They tried therapy, medication, imposing strict limits, punishments, being supportive -- but Casey's difficulties were persistent. Erika and John felt a deep love and commitment for Casey, but they were often exasperated, tired, worn down, and self doubting. And then after another bad weekend -- but no worse than others in the past -- Casey jumped off the bridge. The book is doubly sad because following the retelling of the events leading to Casey's death, Brooks recounts his search to understand what happened and ultimately in large part he lays the blame at his and Erika's feet. He realizes that they had never considered the effects of her early childhood, and he discovers a whole wealth of writing and expertise on the traumatic effects of early childhood in an orphanage and the resulting attachment disorder. More important than anything, he comes to feel that without this understanding, he and Erika did everything wrong -- that they should not have treated her like an ordinary misbehaving child but that they should have worked to reassure her over and over again that nothing she could do would lead them to abandon her. I feel teary as I write this. To lose a child is the worst thing that can happen. To feel that there's something you could have done and should have done to prevent the loss is unimaginable. But Brooks seems to have written this memoir as part of the healing process, and in the hopes that other adoptive parents in his shoes will be better informed. Although dealing with a hugely painful topic, in the end this book is readable because Brooks is so straightforward and sincere in sharing his story. This is a hard book to read, but it's definitely worthwhile. Thank you to the publisher and Netgalley for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

Michelle says

A heartbreaking memoir about a father trying to come to grips with his daughter's life and ultimately her suicide. Brooks and his wife adopted Casey from Poland at 14 months old, and Brooks never truly appreciated the devastating consequences of attachment disorder until after she died. He is very honest about his (and his wife's) mistakes and his thesis seems to be that this didn't have to happen, and perhaps wouldn't have if he'd understood what early life in an orphanage could mean. It was a very salient point about the fact they shouldn't have "punished" her but gotten to the root of it (and they tried many a therapist...just not the "right" ones, but they absolutely cannot be blamed for this.) At times the story is a little too straightforward and simplistic in tone for the subject matter, but there's really no great way to handle this story. I hope this book is a huge success and brings awareness to the very real issue, at least in the adoption and fostering communities.

John Brooks says

This book should be a wakeup call to all adoptive parents and professionals about the urgent issues adoptees and their parents face. John Brooks has written a compelling account of his experience of losing his beloved adopted daughter to suicide.. A must-read for anyone who has adopted or plans to adopt.

Nancy Newton Verrier, attachment therapist and author of
The Primal Wound and Coming Home to Self

Giacominafiorino says

I liked this book! It goes deep into the relationship of parent and child with a powerless feeling of not doing a good job at parenting.

Ashley says

This was a really powerful book. It opens with the author waking up to find that his daughter Casey isn't home and has left what looks to be a suicide note. After calling the police and heading out to the Golden Gate Bridge, they are devastated to learn that she has jumped off the bridge.

The book goes all the way back to when they adopted Casey from Poland when she was 14 months old. From the time they brought her home, she was prone to impossible fits. She would wail and scream and kick and bite. It continued all through her childhood and into the teen years. Her parents often found themselves at their wits' end with her behavior. They tried therapist after therapist to no avail. After her suicide, which seemed to be an unfortunate and irreversible rash decision, her father began researching attachment disorders and realized that those crucial developmental months during her first year of life spent in an orphanage permanently shaped her personality and behaviors.

I feel so badly for the author. It is abundantly clear that he and his wife tried everything they could to help

their daughter. Unfortunately, they did not have the full understanding of the root of her behavioral problems. I felt so bad for Casey, but the way she acted was atrocious and I see why sometimes her parents reacted the way they did.

I am glad this book was written because it brings attention to two important things - understanding attachment disorders and putting a suicide barrier up at the Golden Gate Bridge. The afterword mentioned that the barrier was voted for in 2014, with hopes to start building in 2016 and finish in 2019.

John Krotzer says

I applaud the author for writing this book I cannot imagine how hard it must have been to walk through all of the difficult times with a daughter who eventually kills herself.

I thought the author did a very good job highlighting the mistakes he and his wife made along the way, most done with the right intentions but harmful nonetheless. That takes courage. I also thought the information on attachment disorders was well researched and presented.

Where this book bothered me was the way the psychiatrists and therapists were portrayed, in several cases like they didn't care or were inept. While I am not in this field, I do know that it is very, very hard to diagnose mental disorders in a patient who won't talk to you. This isn't a TB test ... the brain is unbelievably complicated, and with an uncooperative patient, next to impossible to discern. Casey was a skilled manipulator, and could easily have intentionally fooled or misled her caregivers. There are certainly fraudulent psychiatric professionals out there, but the ones they encountered seemed to me to be qualified and well intentioned.

I also take exception to some of the criticism of Poland, from where Casey was adopted, and here I do have experience as I also lived there for several years in the 1990's, at the time Casey was adopted. When you come from a wealthy American suburb, it is next to impossible to understand how chaotic, desperate, and ill-resourced the country was in 1990, following decades of Soviet Communist influence and mistreatment (also true elsewhere in Eastern Europe). The people who cared for Casey/Joanna were more likely than not unpaid (or owed wages), under resourced, and had 10x the children that they should have. They were, by all measures, saints. It's a little too convenient to throw them under the bus and suggest they didn't hold or hug their daughter enough during her first 14 months of life. The nuns may have had unlimited love, but VERY limited money, adolescent psychiatric training, and hours in the day.

When the author started to look for answers as to why his daughter committed suicide, it should not have surprised him - in our overly litigious society - that people in the adoption process did not want to speak with him.

My final criticism was on the epilogue. After several chapters on addressing the root causes of Casey's problems, the book ends on the importance of installing suicide jump nets on the Golden Gate Bridge. That seems like a band aid solution to me, though it may save lives. It isn't necessarily dumb or wrong, but just seems out of place. I'd like to have known more about how the author and his wife were doing.

Overall, a good book - not necessarily a great book - but a courageous one that I hope brings the author some closure.

Paul says

This is a sad memoir of the belated discovery of attachment disorder among adopted children, and how the author, whose daughter jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge to her death, found out about it.

Although the author sometimes seems like Dagwood Bumstead in his inability to do simple things like hold a baby, the screeching relationship that he and his wife had with their developmentally delayed adopted Polish daughter sounds like pure hell. Sadly, he didn't even come to know about attachment disorder until after his daughter's death.

It is a cautionary tale for adoptive parents to do more early research on foreign adoptions, especially of developmentally disabled children, before they actually undertake the process. Being the father of an adopted daughter myself, I can imagine how bad it could get and how lucky my wife and I were never to have any evidence of attachment disorder with our Korean daughter. All she ever wanted was to be boss of herself, and she certainly is as an adult.

This is a valuable book because it seems that there is little research done on attachment disorders, and this may provide an impetus for more to be done and for happier adoptions to be executed in the future.

Florence Osmund says

"The Girl Behind the Door" by John Brooks is a compelling true story about a family in turmoil, how it came to be that, and the aftermath that followed. A sad but painfully honest story, it's about mistaking a child's pain for bad behavior. The author generously opens up his heart and vulnerability to reveal his daughter's journey through life that ended so tragically, his desperate search for answers, the waves of guilt he endured, and his pursuit to help other families who are in similar situations. With narrative that was sometimes difficult to hear, this book provides valuable insight into attachment disorder--a must read for parents whose adopted children are displaying inexplicable troubling behavior.

Lauren says

This is raw as hell. I've read books about far more harrowing experiences, but this grieving father exposes his heart and soul and his pain took my breath away. I had a difficult time reading this and not being majorly bummed.

John Brooks and his wife Erika adopt Casey from Poland in the early 90s. She is already over a year old and living in an orphanage. Although she has a reasonably normal childhood, she becomes out of control as a teenager. Interesting book in that it explores Attachment Disorder, heavily affecting children who went without a primary caregiver, which the author is now well aware of. He knew nothing about it prior to his daughter taking her life. This dad just broke my heart. He tried so hard to do everything right and it all went so very wrong.

