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For
DINNER WITH DOPPELGANGERS
A TRUE STORY OF MADNESS AND RECOVERY

Book Information

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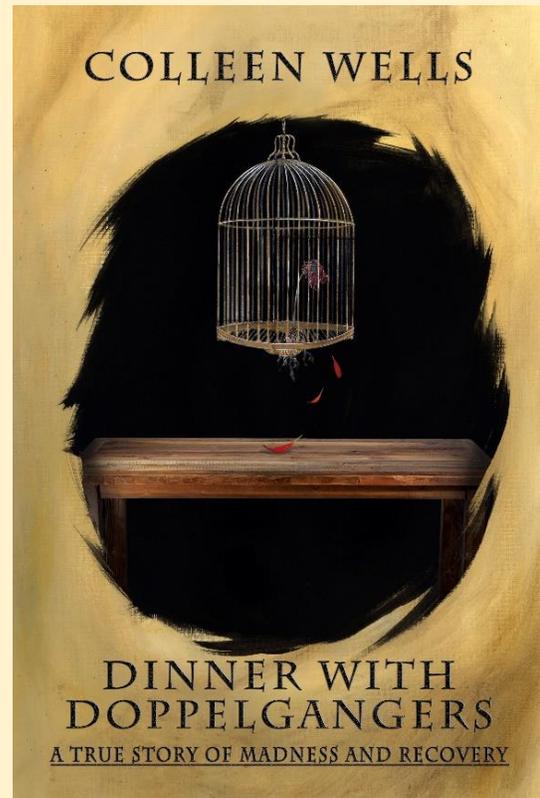
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Advanced praise for *Dinner with Doppelgangers – A True Story of Madness & Recovery*:

“Colleen Wells captures the essence of living with bipolar as a young adult through parenthood....A must read for anyone experiencing or living with someone who is diagnosed with a mental health disorder.”

-Alison Leslie, LCSW, Bloomington, Indiana

“Colleen Wells has written a scorching and searching memoir. In her fiercely honest writing, she is our guide inside a troubled mind and spirit. It’s a harrowing story of an assault and battery

from within that, in Wells' spare, unrelenting prose, is all too real. You will finish this book affected and greatly moved by Wells' journey."

-Richard Goodman, author of *French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France*

"Raw, unabashed, naked fear comes spilling out onto the page in this simply complex memoir of one woman's descent into manic depression. Colleen Wells doesn't explain what it's like to be sucked into the darkness, she takes us there.

Wells's style is a straightforward, unpainted canvas, yet she fills every inch of the page with color as if there's a Van Gogh on the tip of her pen. If you want fluff, this isn't the book for you. As a minimalist wordsmith, she brings the reader full circle into her nightmare.

Her descriptions of living in the hospital will have the reader on bended knee, begging for mercy, as well as embracing the family who wraps their arms around this desperate individual, hugging her when she cannot hug herself. One can only shudder at the responsibility that mental illness visits on children, not to mention the private hell of a husband who can only watch as his partner sinks deeper, nearly out of reach.

This is not just not another account of self-absorption. This is an exposure of the most private nature. The reader will gain insight into an often off-limits subject, and the hope that just as surely as one can lose herself in the abyss, one can also step into the light.

It takes courage to write from the inside out, and to tell the truth with complete abandon. Wells is one such generous author."

-Sherry McCaulley Palmer, author of *Life With Charley: A Memoir of Down Syndrome Adoption*

"The commonplace takes on the extraordinary in Colleen Wells' writing. Understated, wry, always candid, her voice weaves loose straws of events, conversations, memories, song titles and other elements of everyday life into a richly woven basket of experience.

Her stories reveal her to be not only a close observer but an astute interpreter of life's tender details."

-Dianne Aprile, editor of *The Book*, author of *The Eye is Not Enough: On Seeing and Remembering*

"*Dinner with Doppelgangers* is an evocative, lyrical journey that traces the harsh realities of mental illness with humor, compassion, and insight. Painful at times, it comes straight from the heart."

-Alyce Miller, Professor of English and Creative Writing at Indiana University

"Readers will not find a molecule of self-pity in *Dinner with Doppelgangers*. The poetic reflections in this volume demonstrate not only author Colleen Wells's careful wordsmithing but also her forthright courage. With innocence and honesty, Wells has traveled bravely back

into the nightmare of her past to show her readers the light that led her from the darkest place imaginable. In spare and carefully crafted language, she takes that gleam of light and molds it into art that illuminates her salvation. Her book is highly informative about the helplessness a victim of bipolar disorder experiences. At times tragic and at other times funny, this book is ultimately an uplifting read.”

-Louella Bryant, author of *WHILE IN DARKNESS THERE IS LIGHT*

“At one point in this memoir of bipolar illness and the heroic building of a life outside the illness, a doctor tells the writer Colleen Wells that she can have a bright future if she harnesses her manias “for good.” It’s “as if my illness” she writes, “is a workhorse/I can whip into submission.”

She knows it’s not that simple. But in *Dinner With Doppelgangers* we see her taking up the reins with grace and humor, in full knowledge that the workhorse is much wilder and more willful than the doctor imagines: more Plath’s flying horse Ariel than plodding beast. Still, she has no choice.

As a young girl, Wells collected diagnoses like she once “collected flavored lip gloss”. Whatever the diagnosis, she soon learns that she can’t always trust her perceptions or the conclusions she draws from them. Does resourcefulness mean she’s sick or well? Is productivity a sign of mania or creativity or both? A life in which angels and Elvis suddenly appear to her while she waits in line at the pharmacy or where something within her can insist there is a bomb in the remote control is the same world that includes meaningful synchronicities like a day of butterfly sightings that remind her “of the possibility of a graceful transition”.

This is a world in which transitions must be navigated carefully but with an open heart. And navigate it she does, both on and off the page. Wells writes about her hospitalizations with the same candor she writes about her love of nature and of family. She writes honestly of the effect of mental illness on those around her. *Dinner with Doppelgangers* is a brave and important look inside the experience of mental illness from a writer who has been there.”

-Susan Neville, author of *Sailing the Inland Sea: On Writing, Literature, and Land*

About the Author: Colleen Wells



Colleen Wells writes from Bloomington, Indiana, where she lives with her husband, three children, three dogs and three cats. Her work has appeared in *Adoptive Families Magazine*, *Chicken Soup for the Adoptive Soul*, *NUVO*, *ORION*, and *The Potomac Review* among other magazines and anthologies. She holds an MA in English from Butler University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University. Colleen has held a variety of jobs that make connections with people including a position working in activities at an assisted and independent living home, teaching as an adjunct in colleges, and working in preschools. She loves reading young adult novels and painting birdhouses, embellishing them with recycled objects. Her bucket list includes traveling to Ireland, living on a small lake, and going back to school for environmental education. She is seeking certification to facilitate writing and healing circles in her community. Colleen's best words to live by are "my glass is always half-full."

You can contact Colleen through her website: ColleenWells.com or email her directly at colleenwells@earthlink.net.

***On Dinner with Doppelgangers – A True Story of Madness & Recovery* & More on the Author**

Every year one in four adults experiences mental illness in the United States. 6.1 million American adults have bipolar disorder. “Mood disorders such as depression are the third most common cause of hospitalization in the U.S. for both youth and adults ages 18-44” (NAMI “Mental Illness Facts and Numbers”).

The book is important because it deals with mental illness, specifically Bipolar Disorder I in the context of a family. Spanning roughly 20 years of time with a few glimpses into childhood, the book illuminates the illness at various ages.

Written with a straightforward and accessible style and crafted in a series of vignettes, it tells a unifying story. This memoir in narrative snapshots creates in quick, candid, sometimes droll, sometimes dark prose, a view into madness and recovery. These pieces not only provide a full narrative arc of her twenty-two year journey with bipolar disorder, but that of her ebullient, adopted boys from Ethiopia and understanding husband.

It begins almost as a young adult piece because the originating voice is from the age of eighteen when she was first diagnosed. *Dinner with Doppelgangers* continues, however, in increasingly adult tones, until she reaches the age of forty and recovers from a severe mania.

Ms. Wells is available for readings and book-signing events and is especially interested in giving presentations in schools. She feels adolescents today have much to deal with from peer pressure to bullying, events that can lead to things like depression.

Knowing there is a high prevalence of mental illness in our most vulnerable populations including those experiencing homelessness, veterans, and the incarcerated, she’s interested in sharing her story anywhere it can help.

In addition to memoir, she writes journalism, personal essays, short stories, and poetry. The piece she is most proud of is called “Roadkill—Casualties of the Car Culture,” which was published by *NUVO* in 2002 and earned a first place for Feature Writing Award through the Indiana Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Excerpts *Dinner with Doppelgangers*

Group

In the morning they give me more Haldol,
which winds me up like a spinning top,
like a whirling dervish in a blue, terrycloth
bathrobe.

After breakfast it is time for group. Our plastic
chairs in primary colors are fashioned into a half
circle.

I am told to sit down. All eyes are on me.
Everyone is dressed for the day but me.
I turn to the woman to my right and ask her if we
are in hell and if she sees the black ravens
hovering in the sky like I do.
She gets up, takes another seat.

I am left alone, in group.

Brains on Display

I'm writing a story about a medical museum
on the grounds of the now closed Central State
Hospital.

The museum was once a state-of-the-art
medical research and teaching facility.

There are rows and rows of jars filled with
the brains of former Central State patients.

They are swimming in liquid in their amber-colored
enclosures.

The brains themselves are the color of canned, halved
mushrooms.

I can't help but think how if I'd been alive in the late
1800s, one of those brains would be mine.

Borderline Personality Disorder

That summer and fall I am in and out of the
hospital a lot.
I collect diagnoses like I used to collect flavored
lip gloss.
Depression.
Major Depression.
Manic-depression.

My favorite is borderline personality disorder.
I am borderline. My personality is disorderly.

An Offering

The next day while Rick is at work I call up the
contractor who helped us remodel our house last year
and announce that we need to read Tom Robbins' *Still
Life with Woodpecker* together.
When Rick finds out he's afraid I am getting manic. He
takes me to see my therapist, to get her opinion on
whether I should be hospitalized. In her office I can't
sit still. I produce a white plastic bag filled with
random things—CDs, return address labels, a
newspaper, and a children's book.

I think the objects are proof I have reached
enlightenment, and hand each one to her like an
offering.

Sample Questions with Answers by the Author

Q: What was your motivation in writing this book?

A: I needed to write about my experiences with mental illness as an exercise in writing for my own healing and in writing what I know. My hope is that through sharing my story with others impacted by mental illness, it might inspire the courage for others to share their own stories. I also want to make a dent in the stigma around mental illness.

Q: Why did you choose this method of telling your story?

A: First it was a manageable way to share it. The format also compliments the message by illuminating events and feelings in short bursts or insights almost like manic thoughts. Some of these vignettes came to me originally as poems, others as short essays.

Q: What advice do you have for family members dealing with similar situations?

A: Be the best advocate you can be for your loved one. Seek support by connecting with others who have gone through similar events. Knowledge is power. Educate yourself. Rely on family and friends for respite. Practice your own self care.

Q: You've had a number of mental health care providers. Which one influenced your recovery or relapse the most?

A: I was blessed to have a very understanding doctor at the health center during my undergraduate years. He was skilled at working with young adults. I have a wonderful psychiatrist now. There have been instances where I wasn't as lucky. That's why it's important to always advocate for yourself, and to communicate to your family what your wishes are for any future relapse.

Q: What authors do you admire?

A: I grew up reading Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, Shel Silverstein, and Dr. Seuss. In college I loved reading Lorrie Moore, Sylvia Plath, J. D. Salinger, John Steinbeck, and Richard Wright. Currently I read a lot of young adult novels. Authors I admire include Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, and Ellen Hopkins. I love Raymond Carver's short stories and wish I were friends with Wally Lamb.

Q: Are there any future projects you have in mind?

A: I'd like to help create an anthology of writings on mental illness. One of my favorite such collections is *Writers on Depression*, edited by Nell Casey. I'd also like to write something that impacts animal welfare in some kind of positive way, and I'd love to try my hand at a young adult novel.

Q: What writing advice do you have for first-time authors?

A: Read a ton, take classes or workshops as feels right to you, and surround yourself with a merry band of helpers. I am grateful for the instructors and mentors I've had, the writing workshops, seminars, and groups I've been a part of. Without having been lifted up by these influential people and experiences, my book wouldn't exist.