

Changing My Mind
By Margaret Trudeau
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Reviewed by Jamal Ali

Margaret Trudeau reveals in her memoir her struggles with a mental illness that has plagued her since childhood. Written with sincerity, insight and courage, Margaret notes that her hope for this book is that friends and family of those suffering mental illness will learn the markers of depression and gain the confidence to intervene and help. The shocking reality is that mental illness affects one out of every five Canadians. This is a fact that society cannot ignore. The types of mental illness are: depression, anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, etc.

Since Margaret is afflicted with bipolar disorder or manic depression, she notes that this form of mental illness inflicts a \$15 billion economic burden on the nation every year. Many people in Canada suffer in silence with a mental illness, because of the stigma surrounding the medical condition. Also a significant number live in a state of denial about their illness, because of their refusal to accept their prevailing medical condition. The author must be admired for breaking the silence and coming out of the state of denial.

Because of her marriage to the then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Margaret became Canada's youngest first lady. As a result, she caught the attention of the public. She shares with readers the happy occasions of the couple's married life: the birth of their first son, Justin, on Christmas Day and their second son, Sacha, on the same day two years later. There was another side to the author's life at the couple's residence on 24 Sussex Drive in the nation's capital that was unknown: her increasing isolation together with depression offset by bouts of mania.

Two years after the birth of the couple's third son, Michel, the marriage broke down. Margaret's yearning to pursue a life of freedom beyond the confines of her residence led to her discovery of happiness in her work as a photographer and in her marriage to real estate businessman Fried Kemper. It was the tragic death of Michel Trudeau and shortly afterwards the passing of Pierre Trudeau, that caused her to spiral into suicidal depression. Although she sought medical help for many years, it was only when science caught up with her condition that she was able to accept the diagnosis of bipolar and finally learn how to deal with it.

This profoundly moving book is an inspiration for those suffering a mental illness. As they read through its pages, they are constantly reminded that there's hope. For me the book serves as a personal reminder of my struggles with schizophrenia in my earlier years and the remarkable transformation I experienced in accepting my diagnosis and learning to live with it. I wept not only for Margaret but also for those painful years I experienced with a debilitating illness. This beautifully written book is an excellent read.

