

# Playing the Genetic Lottery: A Book Review

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## TERRI MORGAN'S PLAYING THE GENETIC LOTTERY- BOOK REVIEW BY ASHLEY SMITH

When Terri Morgan, the author of *Playing the Genetic Lottery*, first contacted me by email to ask me to give a review of her new novel, she immediately informed me of her intentions, "My goals in writing this book were to reduce the stigma about mental illness, provide information about mental illness and treatment, and validate the experiences of families and caregivers."

As a mental health advocate, individual living with schizophrenia, and also a mother, I can understand and relate to the complexity of situations acknowledged in this novel. After reading her fictional narrative about a woman, Caitlin Kane, who has unique experiences with mental illness- she was raised by two parents that have schizophrenia- I encourage students, and families effected by the illness to read this novel because it exemplifies all of the author's objectives.

In fact, as I read the novel I could nod my head in agreement at the description of scenarios and thought to myself, this author really gets it! By this understanding, I recognize that Ms. Morgan must have performed extensive research to articulate the emotions, fears, and actions so eloquently proclaimed throughout the fictional lives depicted in this story. I appreciate the unique mental health experiences represented in this novel to help educate the public, we need more examples of diverse lifestyles, the realities of schizophrenia, and its impact on families.

Schizophrenia is a very complex mental illness that has a tendency to "run in families." There are a lot of misconceptions about individuals living with this mental health challenge. The truth about people living with this condition is they have vastly different experiences, for some individuals who are in treatment, and others who are not. Also there has been a major shift in the way the mental health system cares, treats, and supports recovery.

I have personally experienced some of the incidents depicted in this novel such as living arrangements, legal enforcement, and family support, among other similarities that parallel my own recovery. I understand that one book cannot effectively express everyone's experience. But there still needs to be a balance in portraying the lives of individuals who are diagnosed with schizophrenia and the reactions of their family. A single book cannot express the spectrum of what recovery looks like to all. Yet, Terri Morgan provides a great description of the differing lifestyles and coping skills practiced among characters who have mental illness in this novel that are realistic.

With that said, I like this novel because of the way Ms. Morgan describes people living with schizophrenia and their impact on the family, which were well articulated. As evidence of understanding the complexity of challenges brought on by the family unit as a result

of the person living with an illness Ms. Morgan includes a plethora of mental health related situations.

For example, suicide is largely misunderstood in our society and the people that engage in suicide attempts or who commit suicide are commonly shamed by the community, despite their anguish as a result of suffering from mental illness. However, Ms. Morgan addresses this problem head on, and many other challenging situations, which allows the reader to see another perspective on these issues in order to ultimately alter their views on such difficult situations and to express compassion.

Also, another interesting underlying truth that I liked was bringing attention to the fact that many individuals who have mental illness engage in hobbies and careers that are based on their creativity. Other subtle learning points suggest that people who have a diagnosis are striving to cope with the daily struggles of life like everyone else- working, raising a family, relocating, and supporting each other.

However, the concerns I had as an advocate and individual living with schizophrenia was the use of the term "schizophrenic." In my experience with peers who are living with the illness, including myself, there has been a shift in language from using the word "schizophrenic," which is replaced by the popular phrase: "individual living with schizophrenia." The mental health community is starting to avoid the term "schizophrenic" because it identifies the individual by their illness instead of simply stating they are an individual who has schizophrenia. However, a large majority of people directly impacted still use this word, but it will inevitably expire in the future.

Despite this concern, by the end of the novel, I could overlook the terminology because of evidence of the sincerity in the author's tone carried out through this fictional yet seemingly real story. Moreover, the educating moments such as varying treatments and therapy, assisted outpatient treatment, support groups, and countless other practices within the mental health community are invaluable.

Lastly, in another email to me, Ms. Morgan reemphasized, "my novel will help educate people about the disease, how it can be treated, and how family members and close friends are impacted when a loved one is ill. By raising awareness, I hope to raise compassion. I also hope my novel validates the experiences of families and caregivers, and helps remind them of how valuable their love and support is."

Terri Morgan author and co-author of eight non-fictional books, in addition to *The Genetic Lottery*, her first book of fiction, is an eloquent writer on the subject of schizophrenia. I believe she is a remarkable author because of her unquestionable evidence of elaborate research on experiences with schizophrenia. She has opened the door to a minority group that is largely misunderstood and misrepresented. I support her anti-stigma efforts as both an advocate and individual living with the illness, by promoting this book because it educates readers on the myths, lifestyles, and treatments of individuals living with schizophrenia. The novel also includes discussion questions for book clubs and readers.

Terri Morgan has been writing professionally since 1980, and has written material in countless newspapers and magazines. To

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purchase the e-book or paperback copy of *The Genetic Lottery*, you can visit her website at [www.terrimorgan.net](http://www.terrimorgan.net) or go to [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk) or [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Some of the proceeds are donated to mental health organizations and research.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Ashley Smith Atlanta, Georgia, United States I was diagnosed with adult onset paranoid schizophrenia at the age of 20... I experienced the ups and downs of mental illness- incarceration, hospitalization, personal care home, outpatient treatment program and clubhouse- but i survived it! Now, I share my life with you of how I am coping with my illness. I hope this blog encourages you to seek PROFESSIONAL help for yourself or a loved one... Please comment. Thank you! View my complete profile.

Tuesday, January 15, 2013 Terri Morgan's Book Review of *Playing the Genetic Lottery* *I was asked by an author to give a book*

*review of her new novel that was published in 2012 and is based on schizophrenia from a family member's perspective. This is my first time reviewing a book, at the request of an author, however, I've been asked before, but shied away from doing it for differing factors. Terri Morgan's email request caught my attention and interest immediately, and I called her shortly after to learn more about the book and how I could help the cause.*

### **Acknowledgement**

*I want to thank Terri for giving me the opportunity to write a book review for her. I feel honored to be a part of her awareness and anti-stigma effort*

This review originally ran on Ashley Smith's websites: <http://overcomingschizophrenia.blogspot.com/2013/01/terri-morgans-book-review-of-playing.html>