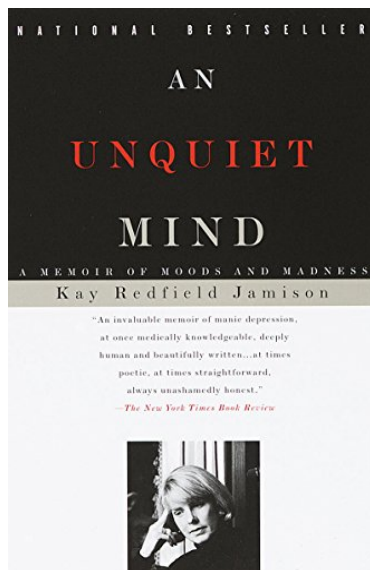


An Unquiet Mind Book Summary, by Kay Redfield Jamison (archive)

by Allen Cheng

<https://www.allencheng.com/an-unquiet-mind-summary-kay-redfield-jamison/>



Mental health disorders affect millions of people and often lead to the tragic loss of life through suicide. The pain and suffering that accompany mental illness are difficult for those unafflicted to understand. Kay Redfield Jamison, a clinical psychologist living with manic-depressive disorder, has attempted to bring awareness to those experiences in her memoir. By divulging the violent, frenzied, and dangerous aspects of her disease, Jamison hopes to create more understanding about mental illness and more empathy for those who struggle to exist in the normal world.

1-Page Summary of An Unquiet Mind

Kay Redfield Jamison experienced her first manic episode at seventeen years old. **Throughout the next 30 years, she rode a roller coaster of mania and depression that made her either insane or suicidal.

**Throughout this time, she struggled to build a career as a professor of psychology and clinician. After a

life of suffering, she finally decided to write this book to reduce the shame and stigma surrounding a life of mental illness.

The Formative Years

Jamison grew up in a military family as the youngest of three children. Her father was an AirForce pilot and meteorologist known for his intense enthusiasm for life. He often filled the house with music and discussed the amazing beauty of something as simple as a snowflake. Her mother was a kind, generous, and loyal woman who made a warm and stable home for her family. Both her parents supported Jamison's dreams of becoming a doctor and encouraged her to think independently.

The reassurance Jamison found in the structured military world was ripped away after her father's retirement. The family moved to Los Angeles when she was 15, and Jamison struggled to fit in. Around this time, Jamison's father started to behave more erratically. His flights of fancy became dark brooding moods, and he was often violent and verbally aggressive. **Jamison also started to notice her own severe shifts in mood**, but she had always been a moody child and figured it was more of the same. Although others noticed both her wildly active mind and behavior and her withdrawn depressive symptoms, Jamison remained unaware that anything was wrong.

The Troubled Student

Jamison's mood swings got worse after she started attending UCLA for undergrad. **She swung between high-flying intense periods of passion and productivity, and days where getting out of bed and changing clothes were too much to ask.** After studying the signs of depression in a psychology class, she decided to seek treatment. But she chickened out at the last minute.

The only blessing during Jamison's undergraduate career was a job as a research assistant with a psychology professor studying unique manifestations of individual personalities. The slower pace of conducting research and case studies was more suitable for her unreliable moods. She quickly realized that she wouldn't be able to handle the demands of medical school and decided to train to be a research psychologist.

After enrolling in the psychology doctoral program at UCLA, Jamison experienced a brief reprieve of her symptoms. She started working with patients in the medical center, but **she never made the connection between the mental illness diagnoses she provided with her own behavior.** Her lack of awareness translated into a lack of treatment, and shortly after she graduated and joined the medical faculty, she experienced her first severe manic episode.

The Highs and Lows of Madness

The goal of every assistant professor is to receive tenure. Jamison worked toward this goal for 7 years in the midst of the worst period of her illness. She attributes her success in receiving it to the brilliance and ceaseless energy she experienced during her manic states. But these states carried significant consequences.

During her first major manic episode, Jamison separated from her husband and went on a massive shopping spree. Excessive spending is a sign of mania, but Jamison didn't think of it this way. **Within her first two major manic periods, she spent around \$30,000 on everything from multiple Rolexes to taxidermied animals.** Unfortunately, the repercussions of her actions usually hit right around the time her mania slipped into depression.

With the highs of mania come the dangerous lows of depression. After Jamison dropped into her first major depressive state, she started to hallucinate. The images she saw all related to death and decay. She became frightened and finally decided to seek treatment.

Jamison started seeing a psychiatrist she knew from her doctoral program. He was kind and professional, and he was too smart to be outwitted. He listened to Jamison's excuses about her behavior, then very politely informed her she had manic-depressive disorder. He prescribed lithium to help.

Jamison took the lithium at first, but the dosage was too high, and she started to experience negative side effects. She lost her ability to read and concentrate. She was nauseous and sick often, and the effects of the drug made her appear drunk in public. In addition to these side effects, the lithium worked by dulling the edges of both her heightened mind and the shadows of depression. ****She lost her energy and enthusiasm for life, and as a result, she lost a part of who she was. ****

These factors made Jamison stop and start her medication many times. The consequence was an 18-month battle with suicidal depression. Somewhere in the middle of those months, she lost the battle and attempted to take her life by overdosing on lithium.

Love in the Time of Madness

After her suicide attempt, Jamison started taking her lithium faithfully. Her moods started to stabilize, but she was still raw from the pain of wanting to die. Her marriage ended for good, but a new love entered her life. This love would save her in many ways.

David was a visiting professor at UCLA from London. He and Jamison fell in love quickly and started a romance that straddled two continents. His kindness and care for her after learning about her disease made her realize that tolerance was possible. **She felt protected and accepted, and she started to heal parts of her she thought were broken forever.**

A year after she started dating David, he died from a heart attack. Jamison assumed the grief would send her into a tailspin, but it didn't. She focused on work and accepted the inevitability of death. Her grief started to fade, but her love for him never did.

David's love and that of others along the way helped parts of her old self awaken. She still experienced mood swings, but they were less intense and more manageable. **She realized most of her life was spent surviving, not living,** and she decided to pursue the latter. She lowered her dose of lithium and regained her ability to enjoy life again.

Years later, she met her second husband, Richard, a prominent researcher in schizophrenia and the Chief of Neurosurgery at the National Institute of Mental Health in Washington, D.C. Richard was vastly

different in personality and interests than Jamison. Where she was quick to anger, he was calm and reserved. He had no patience for poetry or the performing arts, two things that sustained Jamison's life. Although her moods were often too much for Richard to handle, he always provided a solid foundation of love. **His unwavering unconditional love taught Jamison that a predictable life was far more enriching than a life of reckless passion.**

Coming Out

Jamison had many fears about informing others about her illness. Over the course of her career, she told fellow co-workers to ensure a safeguard against any impairments of her patient care. But she strongly feared professional backlash from others. **She didn't want her objectivity as a researcher to be questioned or for her students to fear insulting her during discussions of mental illness.** But keeping the secret somehow constituted shame. Although she was ashamed of how her behavior had affected those in her personal life, she was not ashamed of her disease.

After moving to Washington to live with Richard, Jamison became interested in genetic mapping of precursors to mental illness. She knew that people might use another's predisposition to mental illness against them. But she also thought knowing who carried the gene would tremendously help early diagnosis and targeted treatment. Her work has surrounded brain imaging to determine the causes of mental health disorders.

Jamison's moods balanced out, and she was able to have optimism for her future again. However, even with all the suffering and damage her illness caused, she wouldn't wish it away. Her manic episodes gave her deep, passionate experiences unattainable to the normal mind. She pushed the boundaries of her mind and found comfort in the knowledge that there was more still to discover. **She knows that lithium saved her life, but more so, love is what gave her the strength to keep living.**

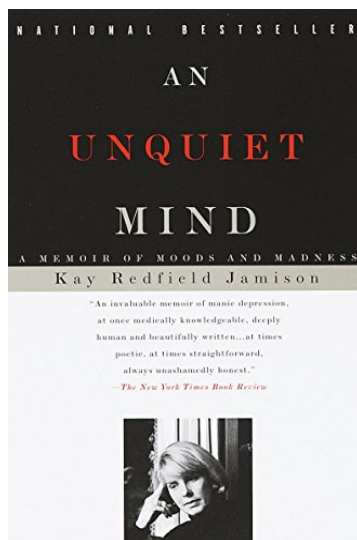
Full Summary of An Unquiet Mind

Prologue: The Madness Within

Kay Redfield Jamison became an assistant professor of clinical psychology at UCLA in 1974. **She was 28 years old and already entangled in the grip of manic depression.** Three months later, her disease hit full throttle. She resisted treatment for years, the same treatment she often encouraged her patients to follow. She assumed her illness was just an extension of her character and believed she could manage it on her own.

Mood swings were nothing new for Jamison. She'd been an emotional child, a temperamental young girl, a depressed teen, and a manic young adult. This history with volatile...

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Here's what you'll find in the **full An Unquiet Mind summary**:

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- Chapter 1: In the Beginning, There Was Light
- Chapter 2: The Birth of Mania
- Chapter 3: A World Gone Mad
- Chapter 4: The War for Wellness
- Chapter 5: The Love of a Good Man
- Chapter 6: Living with Manic-Depression
- Exercise: Find the Power of Resilience
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