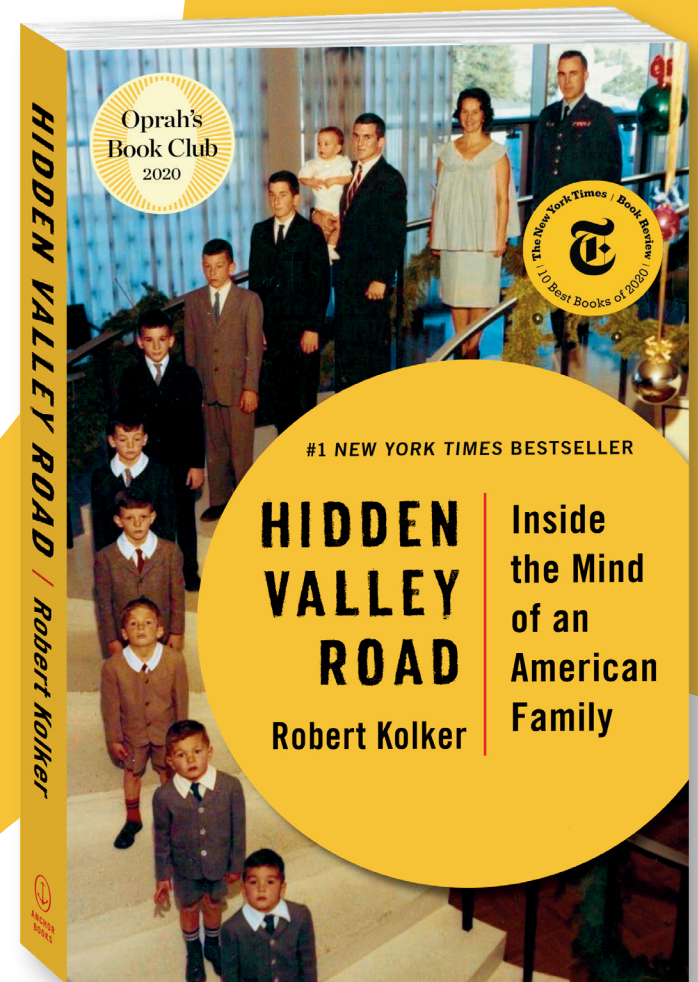


HIDDEN VALLEY ROAD

by Robert Kolker

BOOK CLUB KIT

- Discussion Guide
- Author Q&A
- Galvin Family Tree
- Mimi Galvin's Lamb Curry Recipe
- Mental Health Resources



DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. In *Hidden Valley Road*, each of the Galvin boys who are diagnosed with schizophrenia show different symptoms. How does schizophrenia present differently in each of the Galvin boys?
2. How does the Galvin family adapt when the boys develop schizophrenia? Do any of the family members handle it better or worse than others?
3. At the time when the Galvin boys are being diagnosed with schizophrenia, studies in mental illness claim the parents are responsible. How do you think this affected how Don and Mimi handled the changes happening in their family?
4. How did growing up on an air force base positively or negatively affect the Galvin family?
5. How did this book change your perception of mental illness?
6. Discuss how the youngest Galvins, Lindsay and Margaret, both came to terms with their family's struggle with schizophrenia in different ways.
7. Did your feelings change about any of the characters during the course of reading?
8. What was your impression of Mimi at the beginning of the book? Did it change by the end?
9. Tragedies have the power to shape families to bring them closer or pull them apart. How is the Galvin family shaped by their own tragedies?
10. As the Galvin children begin having children of their own, how does their upbringing on Hidden Valley Road affect how they raise their own children?

AUTHOR Q&A



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What first piqued your interest in the Galvin family?

In the spring of 2016, a friend introduced me to two sisters from Colorado, Margaret Galvin Johnson and Lindsay Galvin Rauch, now both in their fifties, who were the youngest siblings in the family. The more I learned about the Galvin family, the more I couldn't believe their story. It was horrifying. I wondered how such a family could even pretend to stay together under such horrible circumstances — why these sisters wouldn't have run away the first chance they got, never to come back. But the sisters, when I spoke with them, showed that they still had a reservoir of hope. They told me how each of them found a way through their traumatic childhoods. And they told me that their family has a scientific legacy.

Had anything prepared you for reporting on a family with such difficulties, suffering from such a complicated illness?

I have written a few stories about mental health and medicine and science, but when I first met the Galvin family, my most relevant qualification was a career writing about vulnerable people, sometimes entire families, experiencing crises. That would include my first book, *Lost Girls*, which, aside from being about an unsolved murder case, was, at its heart, a nonfiction portrait of five families in crisis.

But I also believe that my interest in families and my desire to understand the rationale of everyone inside a family system comes directly from my mom. She was not a theoretician—we didn't have long conversations about Freud and Jung or anything like that—but she was a great listener, a very neutral presence with enough warmth that people felt comfortable opening up around her. When I'm doing my job well, I feel like I'm emulating her.

You provide some very raw, painful episodes from the Galvins' lives—how did the members of the family whom you interviewed feel about opening up to you?

I took a year before even sending out a book proposal to speak one-on-one with each living member of the Galvin family, including the three surviving mentally ill brothers and the family matriarch, Mimi, who died in 2017, while I was writing. I wanted to be sure that everyone in the family was ready to talk about everything that had happened to them.

AUTHOR Q & A

I honestly was not sure if everyone would agree, but they did. I think they said yes because they see their family's story as more than just medically significant. They see how it might bring comfort to many families experiencing similar issues who are tempted not to seek help or be open about what they're going through.

What was the hardest part of transforming this complex, lengthy story into a nonfiction narrative?

This was the challenge of a career, for sure — telling the story of a family of fourteen people, twelve kids and two parents, each experiencing the family's story differently. But I love intergenerational family sagas like *East of Eden* and *The Corrections*, and so I was excited about giving this a try.

The other great challenge was finding a way to tell the story of the science of schizophrenia without seeming didactic or textbook-like. My goal was to help readers understand everything they needed to know at the exact moment they needed to know it, so nothing felt like being made to eat your vegetables.

What surprised you the most as you researched them, and schizophrenia?

Where to begin? My first surprise was that there has been no significant advancement in the development of new pharmaceutical treatments of psychosis since the development of Thorazine and clozapine more than fifty years ago. Add to that the fact that even after all this time, no one really knows exactly how or why those medicines work.

Then there is the amazing amount of groupthink and tunnel vision that has polluted the fields of psychiatry and psychotherapy for generations. And the sad fact that even after all this time, despite major advancements in treating bipolar disorder and depression and other illnesses, no one can still agree on exactly what schizophrenia is.

What do you think about the state of treating mental illness in the U.S. today?

Because the vast majority of acutely mentally ill patients have difficulty advocating for themselves, we don't see them the same way we see other ill

constituencies. They fade into the background, and are too often overlooked. I found while writing *Hidden Valley Road* that a lot of people I talked with had someone in their family with acute mental illness, but that no one ever really talked about them.

Many clinicians also have a bad habit of operating as if the existing neuroleptic drugs that treat psychosis are as effective as, say, SSRI's are for depression. In fact they aren't analogous. Schizophrenia drugs muffle some symptoms but rarely resolve the condition.

Is there really a prospect in the near-term of the illness being eliminated or a cure being developed?

There is reason for optimism, thanks in part to families like the Galvins that have offered themselves up for research. More genetic clues are being found almost monthly. Researchers are making major inroads into ways to strengthen brain health for people vulnerable to developing schizophrenia before they become symptomatic.

The Brain & Behavior Research Foundation operates as the sort of American Cancer Society for mental illness, raising private money to fund research in ways that the federal government has not. They are doing great work, but researchers need more funding, for sure — particularly in the area of prevention.

The best news of all is that the stigma is fading, and so more people are receiving early interventions that could stave off the worst of the condition.

What are the biggest misconceptions that average Americans have about schizophrenia?

I think many Americans think it's normal for people with schizophrenia to become violent. But that's just not the case. Unfortunately, that belief only fuels the stigma.

AUTHOR Q & A

You write a lot about the “schizophrenogenic mother” theory. Does that explanation carry the same weight now that it did in the Galvins’ day?

The theory that bad mothers caused schizophrenia is one of the greatest mistakes of twentieth-century psychiatry. It’s completely debunked now. But it was at its most powerful when Mimi was a mother, and because her parenting style was so intense she was a sitting duck. She had doctors telling her point-blank that she drove her own children crazy. That’s part of the family’s tragedy.

What interested me most about the schizophrenogenic mother theory is that it came from a place of good intentions. The therapists who believed it were doing battle with other experts who barely acknowledged the humanity of psychiatrically disturbed people at all—they advocated lobotomies and eugenics. So it was a case of everyone being wrong. Which happens from time to time.

I tried to get across in *Hidden Valley Road* just how trapped and helpless the family felt. For example, when the first son got sick, the family had the following choices: (1) Send him to a private facility like the Menninger Clinic, that was too expensive and therefore not an option at all; (2) send him to a state hospital that was for hopeless cases, and essentially give up on him; and (3) send him to a hospital that favored a psychoanalytic approach, or the schizophrenogenic mother, and get blamed themselves for the illness.

It wasn’t just that they disliked all of these options. It was they had no earthly idea of what the right decision was. This was not a mental health care system, really. It was like standing in one huge supermarket, forced to choose from options you aren’t equipped to assess, and knowing full well that across the street there was a whole other supermarket selling completely different stuff, and you had no way of knowing which supermarket was better. (And that’s not even counting a third supermarket across town with entirely different stuff from the other two....)

Do you think the remaining, nonaffected Galvin children came to terms with the fact that they were not schizophrenic? Do they still worry?

I think the six nondiagnosed Galvin siblings are all leading fully functional lives, with jobs and marriages and families. If you struck up a conversation at the supermarket with any of them, nothing would register as unusual about any of them (and they’re all very likable too). So they certainly have come to terms with

it in a day-to-day way. But if you got to know them all better you’d probably notice a certain amount of hypervigilance that they share—a sense of walking on eggshells. Perhaps that’s something you’ve felt about yourself, too? I don’t think it’s possible to have a traumatic childhood and not still be vulnerable to moments of worry, at least in some small way.

Did you have any idea *Hidden Valley Road* would make such a splash? What do you think this might do for the future of mental illness?

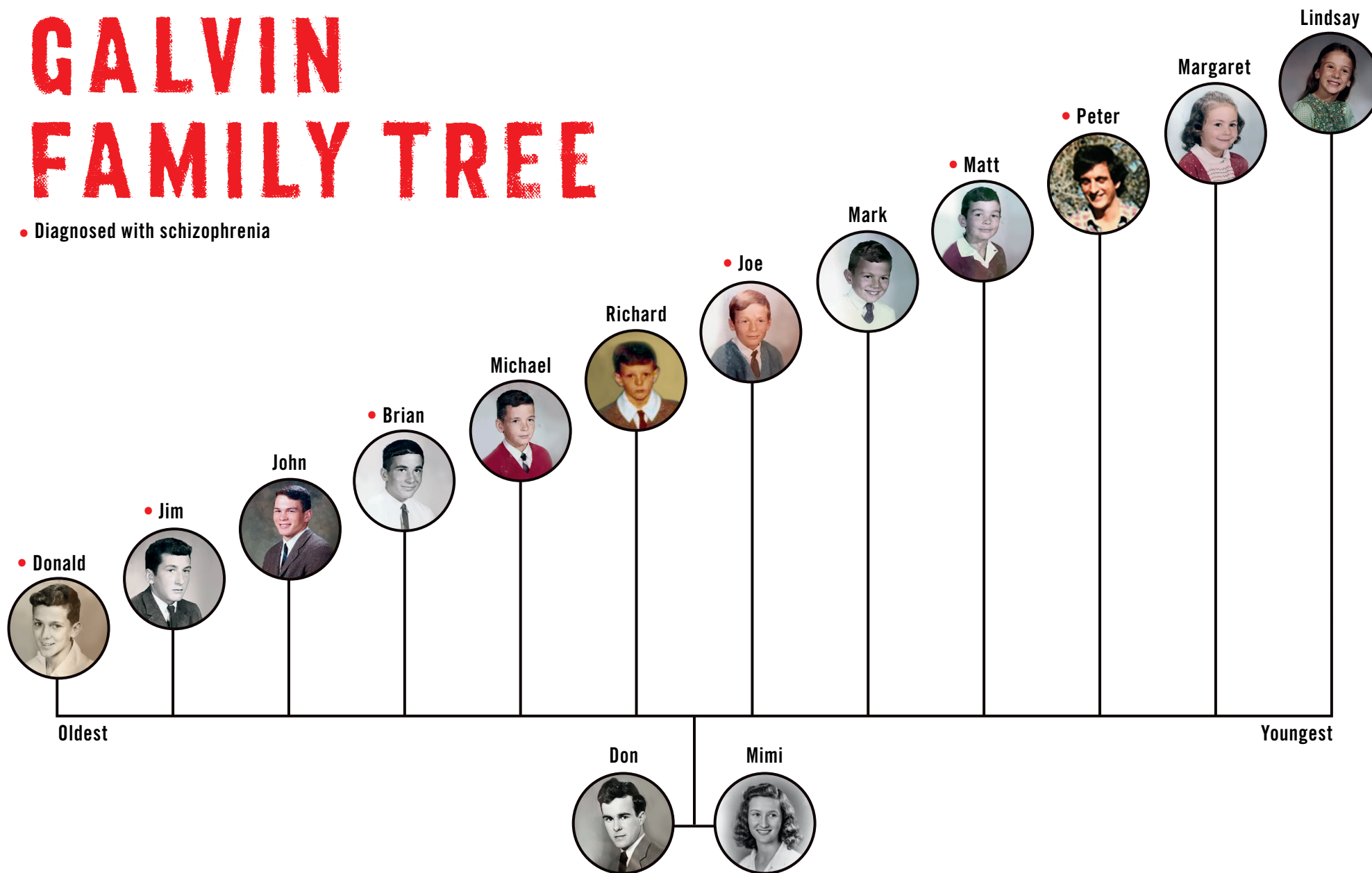
From Oprah’s Book Club forward, I’ve been completely blown away by the book’s reception — and especially moved by email from families touched by schizophrenia. I have to admit that before the book came out, I spent so much energy wrestling control of the narrative and making sure it was clear and understandable — and scientifically accurate — that I didn’t have time to dwell on how many people out there might identify with it so strongly. So that’s been a wonderful and very moving surprise.

I really think that in our lifetime, many psychiatric conditions have been greatly destigmatized. I’m talking about bipolar disorder, anxiety, and depression, for starters. We talk about these conditions now without the judgment and secrecy and shame we used to have. I believe schizophrenia is long overdue for the same shift. And I’d love for this book to be a part of that effort.

Beyond that, I’ve come to think this about the book: Even if your family has not been touched by severe mental health challenges, I think the story of this family is meaningful, especially in difficult situations. I actually believe the Galvin family’s story has a lot to teach us about dealing with challenges, and weathering tragedy. *Hidden Valley Road* is about people who find themselves traumatized and find ways to work through it. It’s about finding the humanity in tragedy. It’s about refusing to shut down. It’s about refusing to turn inward. And despite everything the people in this family went through, I really do think it’s about hope.

GALVIN FAMILY TREE

• Diagnosed with schizophrenia



MIMI GALVIN'S LAMB CURRY RECIPE

Ingredients

- 2 onions
- 2 green apples
- 3 lbs. leftover lamb or boiled lamb
- 1 small crushed clove garlic
- salt and pepper or pepper corn
- 1 cup raisins
- 1½ tbsp. curry powder
- cornstarch or flour of thickening

Method

1. Brown onions and green apples together with butter. Add lamb, which has been cut into small pieces. Cover meat with water or leftover lamb gravy.
2. Simmer parsley, garlic, and seasonings. Add raisins and curry powder. Thicken with cornstarch or flour.
3. Serve over rice.

* It also is delicious when served with chopped nuts, chutney, coconut, or chopped egg.

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MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

www.nami.org

Treatment Advocacy Center

The Treatment Advocacy Center is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating barriers to the timely and effective treatment for people with severe mental illness, including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The group does not accept funding from the pharmaceutical industry.

www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org

Brain & Behavior Research Foundation (BBRF)

The Brain & Behavior Research Foundation (BBRF) is committed to alleviating the suffering caused by mental illness by awarding grants that will lead to advances and breakthroughs in scientific research.

www.bbrfoundation.org