

Book Title: Where the Roots Reach for Water: A Personal and Natural History of Melancholia

Author: Jeffrey Smith

Publisher: North Point Press

Year: 1999

Type: Nonfiction

Book Review by Odessa Bond

Graduate Student

University of St.Thomas, St. Paul, MN

babbbond@aol.com

In this memoir, Smith shares with his readers not only the most intimate aspects of his life with depression, he also shares some information he discovered while researching the topic. For example, he found that depression has been documented since ancient times, when it was acceptable to be depressed. Sixty thousand years ago, depressed individuals were considered the intellectuals of society and included the artists, poets, astrologers, and inventors. Smith also presented a long list of Americans who have made significant contributions to our country. He concluded that although depression has not changed over all these years, the way this disorder is perceived and treated has changed.

Smith wrote this book to share the peaks and valleys of his daily encounters with this debilitating disorder. His attempts to overcome depression included psychotherapy and medication. After a few months when his medication was no longer effective, his physician informed him that he had become resistant to antidepressants. Upon hearing this prognosis, Smith considered suicide but was unable to focus sufficiently to develop a plan. He started a treatment regimen of several of different kinds of medication, which eventually resulted in a hospital stay. Subsequent to his hospital stay, Smith discontinued all medication. His future was very bleak at this time.

In spite of the many obstacles Smith encountered, he always found contentment in nature and relied upon this love to face his daily challenges. After returning to his roots and talking with his grandmother, he was finally able to move forward with his life. Over a period of a few years, he developed a relationship with and eventually married Lisa, who supported him emotionally and financially.

Anyone who reads this book should be impressed with Smith's extraordinary coping skills and his resolve to overcome his severe depression. His hard work and resilience paid off.