

## Lohmann: New book is next step for Midlothian woman on a mission after the loss of her son

BY BILL LOHMANN Richmond Times-Dispatch Oct 2, 2019



Anne Moss Rogers' son, Charles (seen in the background), died in 2015. His rap lyrics are interspersed in her memoir of depression, substance use disorder and his death.

*2017, Alexa Welch Edlund/times-dispatch*

This is not a book a mother would want to write, but it's one Anne Moss Rogers felt she had to.

Rogers lost her youngest son, Charles Aubrey Rogers, to suicide in June 2015. He was 20.

Her new book, “Diary of a Broken Mind: A Mother’s Story, A Son’s Suicide and the Haunting Lyrics He Left Behind,” tells the story of his descent into substance use disorder and depression, the extraordinary lengths his parents, Anne Moss and Randy, pursued to help him and how, in the end, it wasn’t enough. Interspersed within the narrative are Charles’ rap lyrics, which offer an illuminating look into his heart and mind and tortured soul.

The book pulls no punches, and it’s painful to read — so much so that Rogers has warned that it is not something for newly bereaved families (“Too soon and too raw,” she says) — but writing it has helped her navigate the unimaginable grief.

“You can’t stop the pain, but you have to learn to manage it, and writing helped me learn to manage the pain,” she said in an interview. “In the process of writing it, I found healing and I found hope again.”

Her book, published by Beach Glass Books, launched Tuesday with an event at Fountain Bookstore.

Rogers is not one to shy away from public view. The book is merely the latest evolution of her campaign to share the story of her son and her family in hopes of helping others by shining a light on matters often considered taboo or at least too uncomfortable to talk about in public settings. When someone’s sick, communities often rally around families, she said, but when mental illness is the issue the phone rarely rings.

Soon after Charles’ death, she began posting thoughts on Facebook, which led to composing a column she wanted to offer to The Richmond Times-Dispatch. She painstakingly worked on that piece for five months, navigating her way through grief and guilt, as she attempted to translate her emotions into words. When she finally submitted the column, she felt a sense of pride and relief — but it was another two months before it was published. When she got the call that her column would run in the paper and be posted online, she experienced something of a panic attack that her soul would be bared for the world to see.

How would people react to her broaching the deeply personal and painful story of her son’s suicide in such a public way?

Very well, it turned out.

The reaction was overwhelmingly positive, and the column gave readers who had experienced such loss a place to gather and share their stories. The column went viral. Rogers felt empowered. She launched a blog, which she called “Emotionally Naked,” on which she has published hundreds of posts that address addiction and mental illness and suicide, and she’s become a frequent speaker, traveling around the country to talk about these issues. The book takes all of this one step further in a big way as a full-fledged memoir.

And the old feeling of panic is back, at least for now.

“I don’t know that there’s ever been a book quite like this, and that’s scary,” she said. “You do feel really vulnerable and naked ... because I’ve put our mistakes out there and I’ve got our successes out there.”

But the purpose she’s found in this calling outweighs all else: she wants to prevent more suicides by getting help to those who need it. She’s discovered her efforts have helped people “find their own voice by reading mine or hearing mine.” She wrote about a young woman who came across a post written by Rogers about the first anniversary of Charles’ death and responded by sending an email to Rogers, saying she had considered suicide two days prior to reading the blog entry. Reading the words of a mother writing about her devastating loss changed the young woman’s perspective. She reached out to her parents to tell them what she couldn’t for years: She suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts.

“They’re willing to tell their own story, and that’s kind of what I’m trying to inspire here,” said Rogers, who sold her digital marketing company to devote herself to this endeavor and was selected as the 2019 winner of YWCA Pat Asch Fellowship for Social Justice for her work. “I want other people to try to understand what it was like and what families go through struggling with addiction or mental illness or both.”

And, of course, suicide and losing a child.

Growing up, Charles was a popular child who was always in motion and making people laugh, though his amiable façade masked his depression and anxiety, as well as his self-medication through alcohol and drugs that led to a heroin addiction and ultimately his death.

He poured his feelings — the agony, the pain, the creative energy — into his rap lyrics. He filled notebooks with them, as he dreamed of becoming a rap star. In his life, they represented a sort of journal; in death, they became a rough-around-the-edges but treasured connection for his family. Rogers came to have several of those notebooks in her possession.

One of his song titles, “Diary of a Broken Mind,” became the title of the book, and because his lyrics play such an important role, Rogers shares co-author status on the cover with her son.

Even in death, Charles’ personality “sort of captivates the room,” through the stories she tells but especially when she shows videos of him at speaking events. She says, “He’s an engaging, fun personality,” which can help her message hit home, particularly with younger audiences. Opening that line of communication is critical, she said.

“That was my realization, that people just want to tell,” Rogers said. “They want someone to respond, and they don’t want someone to say, ‘You have so much to live for.’ They want someone to listen to their pain first. They want to be heard.”

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## Suicide hotlines

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, please reach out: (800) 273-8255 or text "help" to 741-741.

## 'Diary of a Broken Mind'

Beach Glass Books: [www.beachglassbooks.com](http://www.beachglassbooks.com)

For more from Anne Moss Rogers, visit her blog: [www.emotionallynaked.com](http://www.emotionallynaked.com)