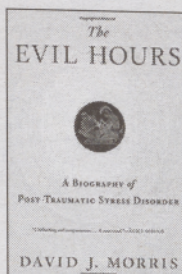
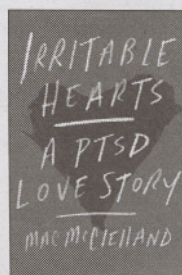


Two books take a fresh look at PTSD and its treatment

BY JOHN BARKER
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The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
by David J. Morris



Irritable Hearts: A PTSD Love Story
by Mac McClelland

There are those victims and their families who live with and suffer from it, those professionals and institutions that fund studies for and treat it, then the rest of us who've heard about it. PTSD: post-traumatic stress disorder. We, in that latter category, need to catch up.

Two books published this February provide us that opportunity, both written by journalists:

"The Evil Hours: A Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," by David J. Morris, tells the story of a Marine veteran of Iraq as a soldier and later a reporter embedded with troops. "Irritable Hearts: A PTSD Love Story," by Mac McClelland, tells the story of a female journalist whose work focuses on covering natural and human rights disasters around the world and, occasionally at home. Her journey includes a trip to report on earthquake survivors in Haiti, her own escape from Katrina and return to New Orleans, time with the gay community in Uganda, reporting on a warlord in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and spending time with those coping with the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

Both books are very readable, written by highly educated, thoughtful people – and there the similarities pretty much end. Read together and, ideally in serial fashion, one feels that the 'catch up' on understanding a mental health malady that is the fourth most common psychiatric disorder in our country has at least begun.

Morris' story opens during his fourth visit to Iraq, third as a journalist, sitting in a Humvee with members of the Army's 1st Infantry Division preparing to head out on a routine patrol. The young soldier next to him asks "Have you ever been blown up before, sir?" He hasn't, but he will be soon.

McClelland's "Irritable Hearts" opens with

her arrival in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 2010, nine months after the earthquake, in a tent city housing survivors and many of their rescuers, where gang rape is rampant and not discouraged by the remnants of the local police. She is housed in luxury in the local tourist hotel. Neither the tent city nor the hotel is a 'safe house.' The 'PTSD Love Story' in the title is her encounter with a French peace-keeper in Haiti who, with the perseverance of a honey badger, stays with their long-distance romance. Eventually they marry in San Francisco.

"The Evil Hours" has the feel of a course of study presented in an interesting narrative form, though a bit draggy in the first third. We learn little about Morris' personal life. He suffers with his PTSD, its most obvious origin being 'blown up' when the Humvee runs over an IED the day after the question has been put to him. He gradually drifts off the rails, into the land of dissociation where time is fragmented. He learns that none of the treatments work for everyone. In fact, some have the potential to trigger severe reactions. Suicide is not uncommon among vets and others dealing with PTSD in its severest forms.

Morris uses his travels searching for effective treatment to discuss the history of what is now known as PTSD – from the Greeks assimilation of sufferers into the community, to the World War II veterans who arrived home 'shell-shocked' unless they had the misfortune to be recovering in an Army hospital visited by Gen. George Patton, who slapped a young patient, calling him a coward.

The review of treatments is fascinating, from Prolonged Exposure where a triggering event is discussed over and over and over . . . to the use of propranolol, now a generic drug initially used as a beta-blocker. It acts to prevent adrenaline from playing its key role in the formation of debilitating memories that trigger flashbacks, but only if administered

within six hours of the traumatic event.

In "Irritable Hearts" the reader also learns of the many approaches currently taken to treating PTSD. But, unlike "The Evil Hours," you live in McClelland's head virtually every minute of every day. Her head is her personal torture chamber. Her lapses into hours of uncontrollable sobbing, trembling, and immobility from seemingly innocuous triggers is her unpredictable companion to her attempts, rather successfully overall, to continue her work. Her work is dangerous, especially for a tall, attractive woman who moves among dangerous men in dangerous regions of the world. One wonders why she continues.

McClelland takes the reader to the brink of "all right, enough already" in the seemingly endless description of triggers during sex, triggers before sex and on and on. But, she doesn't get the reader over the edge to the point of quitting on her chase for relief.

Much of McClelland's story is her therapy in the different forms she attempts – among them alcohol, violent sex, eye-movement therapy known as EMDR, and an extended time with a somatic therapist, that treatment having the greatest positive effect.

How do these books end: with cures? They end with the knowledge that this mental condition can be 'cured' in some, not others, its symptoms moderated for some, not others. And, like cancer, society is learning that nobody goes looking to have PTSD.

June 27 is National PTSD Awareness Day. Read Morris' or McClelland's work and it will be a meaningful day of appreciation for those society has subjected to trauma in the name of freedom, and it has endured the proclivity of too many males to exploit and wreak devastation on females simply because of their physical ability to dominate. The bright side is that PTSD is now getting a degree of attention from which there can be hope.

PHONE CHARGER, from page 5

it does, it's just insane," says Fox. "The (case) that I had was somebody charging their phone by the Greyhound bus station. Don't you have a reasonable expectation that an outlet near the bus station would be OK?"

Jackie's case went to Community Court.

Community Court is an effective way to avoid the higher costs associated with processing misdemeanor crimes through Circuit Court, and it can help people who need social services, like drug or alcohol treatment, says Fox.

Fox says the majority of charges sent to Community Court get reduced from misdemeanors to violations. According to numbers compiled by Clean and Safe District, between 2002 and 2012, about 67 percent of defendants processed through Community Court closed their cases in full compliance.

If defendants don't show up for their initial arraignment, they get a bench warrant – which can lead to an arrest – and if they don't show up after being ordered to do community service or treatment, they're issued a fine ranging from \$435 to \$635.

"Given the population we're dealing with here, it's like trying to squeeze blood out of a turnip," says Fox.

When Community Court was started, defendants would show up once, get their treatment or community service assignment, and then return when it was complete. A 2010 ruling by the Court of Appeals found that defendants had the right to an arraignment so they could have the option of pleading not guilty. This added an extra step that, according to Fox, has contributed in an increase in people failing to appear.

Jackie missed her first arraignment. She says she lost her citation, but turned herself in a couple of months later. Records show a bench warrant had been issued, and when she turned herself in she was booked into jail, and then released the same day. She didn't miss court again.

Jackie usually tries to stay away from Old Town because, she says, she gets hassled a lot, by people on the streets and police alike.

"I used to come down here with my kids and grandkids all the time before I was homeless, and I was never harassed once," she says. For many years she worked in social services, and in some cases, with police officers. "I always liked cops," she says. But now, she says, her perspective has changed.

"Before I became homeless, I had no idea what was going on," she says. "Now I get

harassed. How do you think that makes me feel?"

Jackie says she prefers to sleep in close proximity to the police station because she feels safer there. But if she wants to shower or eat, Old Town is where all the resources are. For Jackie, having a charged cell phone is a matter of personal safety. "Men approach me, stuff happens," she says.

On the day of her arrest, she had to walk through Old Town to get to Transition Projects to take a shower, and her phone was dead.

She says she saw a man charging his phone on the corner of Northwest Davis Street and Third Avenue, and decided to join him. She had no idea that what she was about to do – plug in her phone – could bring a theft charge.

In Community Court she was given the opportunity to get the charges reduced, but only if she pleaded guilty and then completed community service. If things didn't go according to that plan, she'd have a misdemeanor conviction and a hefty fine to pay.

But Jackie didn't want to plead guilty to theft when she felt like she had done nothing wrong. And she didn't want an offense on her record that could jeopardize her chance at

housing. She decided to fight the charge.

This moved her case over to the regular Circuit Court misdemeanor docket where she was assigned the second of two publically funded attorneys who would handle her case.

The district attorney's deal in circuit court wasn't nearly as sweet as the one offered in Community Court. According to Du Clos, it included one year of probation, 20 hours of community service or a \$100 fine, and it required that she take a Theft Talk class. Theft Talk, a class aimed at thieves, costs \$70. For those who can't afford it, the price is reduced to no less than \$50, which the offender has to pay out of pocket. Jackie, again, entered a plea of "not guilty."

The day before Jackie was scheduled for trial, the DA dropped the charge. "It was very reasonable of him to do that," says Du Clos. "I'm not sure that every DA would have dropped the charges."

Jackie has muscular dystrophy and receives disability checks, but she is still sleeping outdoors while she waits for housing she can afford with that income.

Her co-defendant's case still is pending due to his failure to appear in court.