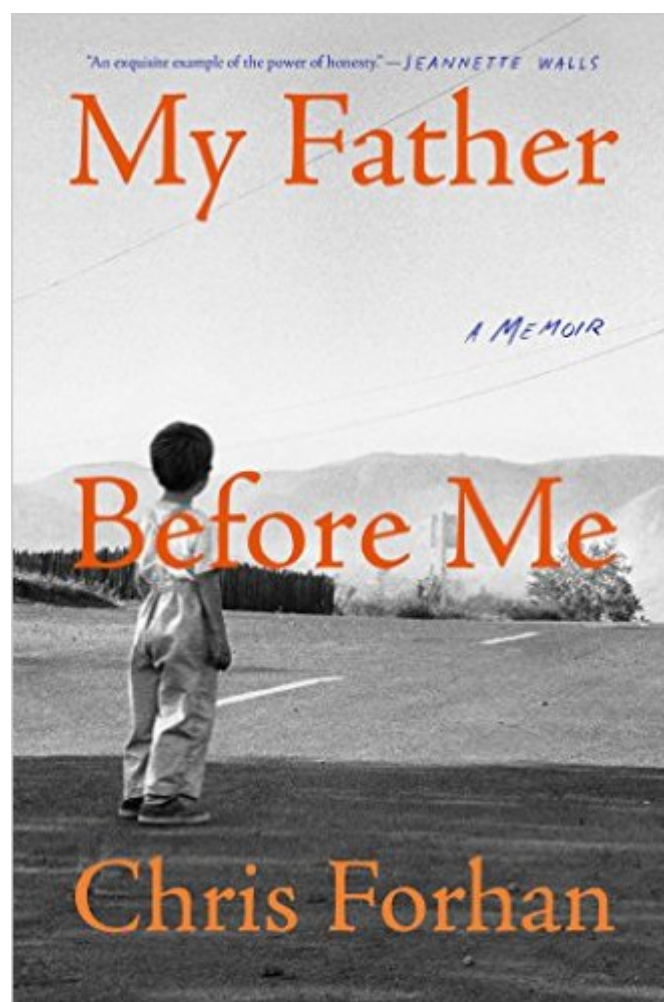


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My Father Before Me: A Memoir



Synopsis

An award-winning poet offers a multi-generational portrait of an American familyâweaving together the lives of his ancestors, his parents, and his own coming of age in the 60s and 70s in the wake of his fatherâs suicide, in this superbly written, âfiercely honestâ • (Nick Flynn) memoir. The fifth of eight children, Chris Forhan was born into a family of silence. He and his siblings learned, without being told, that certain thoughts and feelings were not to be shared. On the evenings his father didnât come home, the rest of the family would eat dinner without him, his whereabouts unknown, his absence pronounced but not mentioned. And on a cold night in 1973, just before Christmas, Forhanâs father killed himself in the carport. Forty years later, Forhan âbravely considers the way he is and is not his fatherâs sonâ • (Larry Watson), digging into his familyâs past and finding within each generation the same abandonment, loss, and silence in which he was raised. Like Ian Frazier in *Family* or Frank McCourt in *Angelaâs Ashes*, Forhan shows his family members as both a part and a product of their time. *My Father Before Me* is a family history, an investigation into a death, and a stirring portrait of growing up in an Irish Catholic childhood, all set against a backdrop of America from the Great Depression to the Ramones. Marrying the literary scope of memoirists Geoffrey Wolff and J.R. Moehringer with the intensity of family novels like *The Corrections* and *We Are Not Ourselves*, *My Father Before Me* is the kind of epic, immersive memoir that comes along once in a decade.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The description of this book makes it sound darker than it is, especially the silence part. Chris

Forhan grew up in a middle-class Catholic family of eight kids during the 1960s and 1970s. Silent is not an accurate way to describe this family. The family was very typical of its time. The author was describing a normal type childhood of school, church, family vacations, sports, friends, television, music. Their father had problems, though, which were not discussed with the kids, especially by him. That was not at all unusual during those decades. At one point, the author says maybe if his father had talked to his children about his problems, they would have been able to love him more. Maybe. Maybe not. Children usually do not want to hear about their parents' problems. Moreover, those who speak a lot of what is troubling them often kill themselves, too. Talking amplifies their problems. What was highly unusual about this story is Mr. Forhan's father actually got psychiatric care decades ago, actually talked to a professional about his troubles. Yet he still killed himself. The author covers the various reasons why his father may have done that, but there is no definite proof as to why. It may even have been something that was not on the author's list of possible reasons. Gambling debts may have been the main reason, but not necessarily. There was no suicide note. After his father's death, Chris Forhan goes on to describe mostly his own life, and how he ended up realizing one day he may have had more of his father in him than he thought. His mother pointed that out. He needed to change his life in some ways and he did.

Among the lingering and lasting effects from mental illness and parental abandonment, poet Chris Forhan chronicles his family history and dynamic that may have led to his father's 1973 suicide when he was 14 years old. "My Father Before Me: A Memoir" is a compassionate tribute to the memory of his father Ed, who left behind a widow and had reared his 8 children in the Catholic faith, was in the Marine Corps, Air Force Reserve, a college graduate and a certified public accountant. In tracing his Irish Catholic family heritage to the Seattle waterfront, Ed was raised by his grandparents who lived in a maintenance cottage that serviced Gas Works Park during WWII. Ed's father had abandoned his family and his mother died prematurely from complications due to diabetes, which Ed also inherited. Although Ed seldom spoke of the loss of his parents, (his toddler brother also drowned) he seemed to perhaps suffer in silence, his family avoided discussion of unpleasant tragic events. After marriage, Ed was able to secure a good job at Alaska Lumber and Pulp, which had some travel, he moved his family into a nice larger home in an upscale Lake Washington area neighborhood. Chris had an ordinary boyhood of Cub Scouts, church and school, as a teen he played the guitar, Bill Gates also lived in his neighborhood nearby. His mother was extremely organized in caring for her children, she later returned to college, earned her teaching certificate and taught first grade. Trouble between his parents was obvious, his father often stayed out all night,

and seemed to have car accidents likely related to his diabetes. A psychiatrist was consulted and his father received medication possibly to help stabilize his depression.

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