



BOOK REPORT

Mental breakdowns plague Vonnegut, the younger

Time flies. It has been 30 years since Kurt Vonnegut's son Mark wrote "Eden Express," an account of his descent into insanity. That book recorded his three separate bouts with mental illness that enjoyed considerable success and, although non-fiction, caused critics to compare his considerable talents with those of his famous father.



Dave Wood
Columnist

wouldn't have to even write about his father; the reader would still know he was his father's son, if only for his absurdist view of the world, his talent for summing up stuff very succinctly and mordantly. Here's a sample:

"Having a famous parent is a leg up to nowhere. It made sense to people that Kurt Vonnegut's son would have mental health problems. It made sense that I would not do well.

"You're Kurt Vonnegut's son? I heard that you had hung yourself in a barn in New Jersey."

"No. Actually I'm in med school."
Or:
"When I told a professor at Harvard that I wanted to go into primary care, he said that it would be a waste of a Harvard education. He had done primary care. It was easy. With a Harvard education we could cure generations rather than individuals.

"So it wasn't enough that I was in medical school. I was supposed to be lining up to cure generations. And I'd thought that I was crazy."

Vonnegut's new book is not all about mental illness. Throughout the book he takes several hard swipes about the medical profession and how the insurance companies are doing their darnedest to corrupt an hon-

orable system. In that sense, it belongs right up there with Dr. William Nolen, the Litchfield, Minn., physician who made big news back in the 1960s with his wonderful book, "The Making of a Surgeon."

I recently read a regional book that I hesitate to show my wife, my helpmate of 40 years. It's "Across America by Bicycle," by Alice Honeywell and Bobbi Montgomery (Terrace Books/University of Wisconsin Press, \$21.95 paper) and it tells the story of Honeywell, a retired writing consultant from Madison, and Ohioan Montgomery, a retired English teacher, who rode their bicycles 3,600 miles from Oregon to Maine.

The pair didn't accomplish their feat 30 years ago, but AFTER they retired.

My wife and helpmate is a recent retiree and also an English teacher and writing consultant. I fear that if she ever sees this well-written diary of the women's adventures, of kindnesses shown them along the way, of aches and pains, of equipment failures and even a grasshopper plague, she'll be on my case to start pedaling.

The very thought of it makes my thighs ache.

David would like to hear from you. Call him at 715-426-9554.

PANEL PRESENTERS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Three organizations presented a panel discussion at a recent American Association of University Women meeting. From left to right, are presenters Kim Wojcik from Turningpoint Shelter; Sue Watters from Our Neighbors' Place; and Joan Mayen and Ronda Davison from Assistance Resource Center.

CANDY BUY BACK



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A Halloween candy buy back was held the Monday after Halloween by River Falls Area Hospital, River Falls Medical Clinic and Main Street Family Dental. Over 210 pounds of candy were collected and will be sent to the troops overseas. Children from River Falls, Ellsworth, Hudson and Baldwin turned in some of their candy to earn a little money and provide treats for military troops. Toothpaste, toothbrushes, and healthy snacks were also given away as part of the candy buyback event.

All's well that ends well? Not exactly. Fourteen years after his last breakdown, Vonnegut, is married, with kids and a promising career. He enjoys a few beers, a half bottle of wine every night at dinner, plus a bottle of Jack Daniels per month, plus Xanax.

After a fishing party with his father, he gets very drunk, then decides he's going to quit the booze and the Xanax. And when he does, he goes crazy all over again, attempts to commit suicide, abuses his wife.

His new book records his road to recovery, a tenuous thing. Along the way, he writes of his mother Jane, and her own mother's insanity, of his estranged father Kurt.

But Mark Vonnegut



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