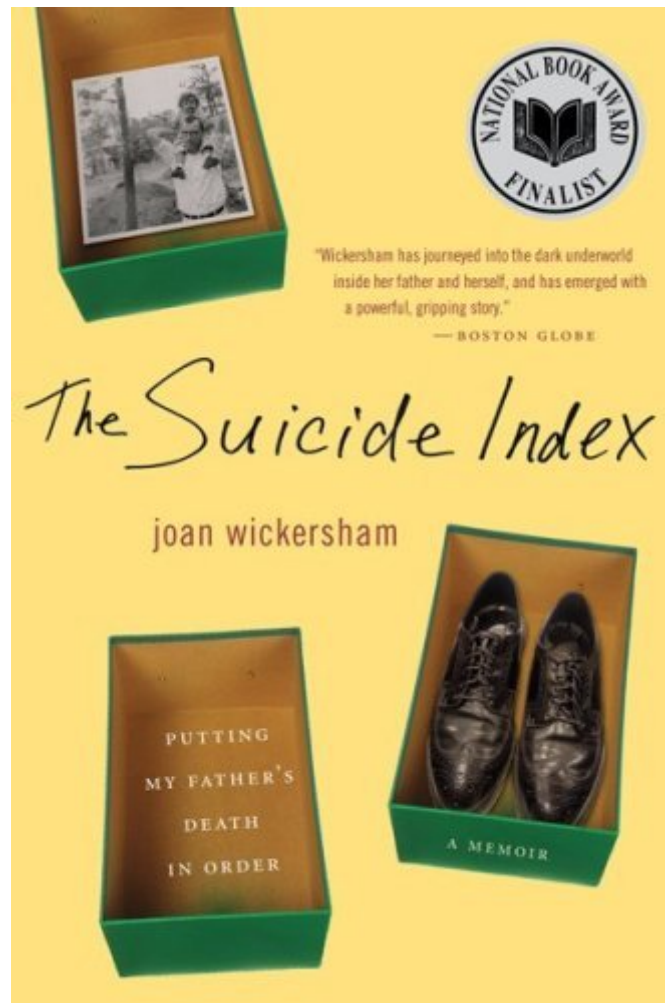


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# The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death In Order



## Synopsis

One winter morning in 1991, Joan Wickersham's father shot himself in the head. The father she loved would never have killed himself, and yet he had. His death made a mystery of his entire life. Who was he? Why did he do it? And what was the impact of his death on the people who loved him? Using an index that most formal and orderly of structures Wickersham explores this chaotic and incomprehensible reality. Every bit of family history, every encounter with friends, doctors, and other survivors, exposes another facet of elusive truth. Dark, funny, sad, and gripping, at once a philosophical and a deeply personal exploration, *The Suicide Index* is, finally, a daughter's anguished, loving elegy to her father.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wickersham takes a very tragic experience, applying a logical index to ungovernable feelings, penning a memoir of her father's suicide that is honest, painstaking and filled with emotional landmines. From the morning she receives the call from her distraught mother, to years later, still grappling with the complicated feelings- acceptable and unacceptable- that plague her life after this loss, the author exquisitely describes the long, dark torment of those left behind by such an act of

self-annihilation. The first response, of course, is numbness, a soft-lensed vacuum that allows the family to survive the early days of shock, the outpouring of support from friends and relatives, with the occasional flash of inexplicable rage that lurks beneath the surface. It is the following years that dominate her grieving process, thinking and rethinking what could have been done to prevent the suicide, to intervene. The elephant in the room, of course, is the undeniable violence of such an action, so heinous and selfish as to belie any daughter's memories of a loving, slightly eccentric father, a man carrying the scars of a brutal childhood and a lack of business sense that adversely affects his family's financial security. The bonds between this eldest daughter and her father are like steel cables; she favors him over her mother, with whom she has an uneasy, somewhat antagonistic relationship, especially after the suicide, the mother flapping wildly through her own jumble of confused emotions, both guilty and self-defensive, left pondering the interminable, unanswerable question: why? Although the author has a sister, it is the nature of such a loss that the sibling is hardly mentioned.

One of the edgiest topics for the human being to explain to oneself, let alone set down for an audience : suicide. Perhaps easier if one's own intended is the story but this is a father's suicide taken on by his eldest and perhaps favorite daughter. Joan Wickersham does something brilliant and highly original in what is both a journal and a once-upon-a-time consideration of a man's life. In compelling yet often dispassionate and sometimes hilarious chapters, Wickersham considers the facts about her family's biographical and social, bodily and geographical conditions as clues to the inevitability of this death. In an almost seamless and well-paced manner, Wickersham makes it possible for the reader easily to join her in turning over pieces of clothing, pastry, furniture, or trinkets with the possibility always present that there is not just an explanation for this tragedy but an (imaginary) reversal of the fact that this man has willingly removed himself forever from life. This is the story of a mid-20th century individual set before us by the writer's ease with which she slips contemporary events in with narratives about a disparate cast of artistic, impractical, cruel, aristocratic, and forceful forebearers. She offers us the earnest 1950's Americans and their aspirations in the post WW II business world alongside the disengaged WASP yacht and horse set of 1980's; the uncertain intimacy of the psychiatrist's quiet, with a tremulous, frustrated mother's voice to an inarticulate, depressed young child.

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