



This Fragile Life: A Mother's Story of a Bipolar Son

Charlotte Pierce-Baker

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“Illuminating and brilliant, with poetry and prose, mother and son lay bare the ravages of bipolar disorder and the journey toward growth and understanding. A touching, lyrical memoir.” —Jewell Parker Rhodes, award-winning author, *Voodoo Dreams* and *Douglass’ Women* Told in a mother’s own words, this is a moving story of a loving African American family that faces the daily crisis of an unpredictable mental disorder. Charlotte Pierce-Baker and her husband did everything right when raising their son Mark: providing emotional support, the best education possible, and the freedom to choose his own path. At age 25, Mark was pursuing a postgraduate degree in film, living with his fiancée, and seemingly in control of his life, so Pierce-Baker never imagined her high-achieving son would wind up handcuffed, barely clothed, dirty, mad, and in jail. Mark’s bipolar disorder manifested late and included hospitalizations, calls in the night, pleas for money, jail, lawyers, prescriptions, doctors, alcohol and drug relapses, and continuous disputes about how to live—and not live. This autobiography weaves a fascinating story of mental illness, race, family, the drive of African Americans to succeed, and a mother’s love for her son. Charlotte Pierce-Baker is a professor of women’s studies, gender studies, and English at Vanderbilt University and the author of *Surviving the Silence*. She lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

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