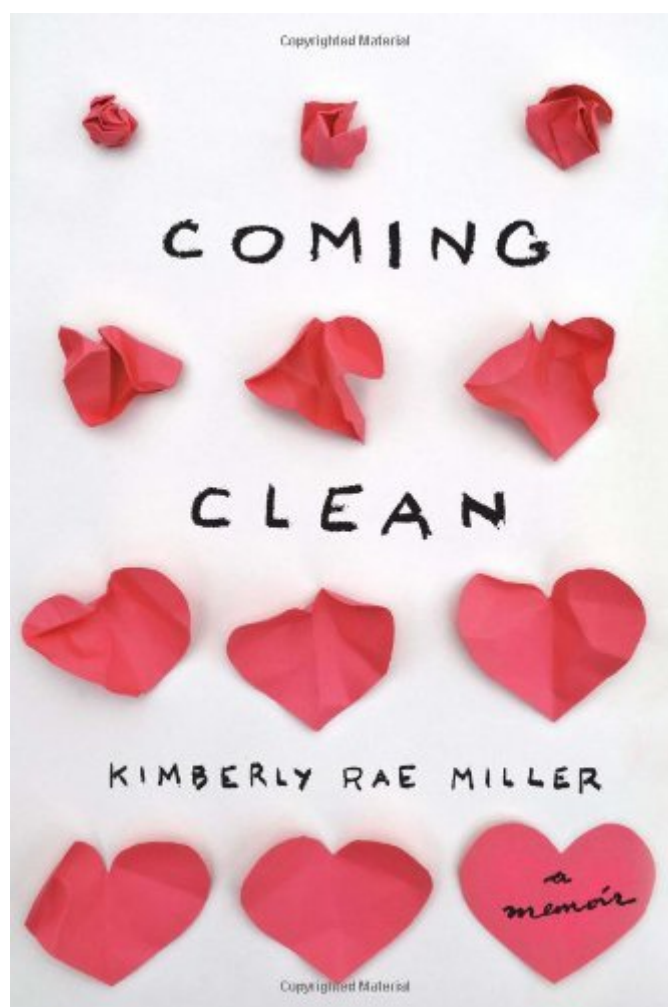


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# Coming Clean: A Memoir



## Synopsis

Kim Miller is an immaculately put-together woman with a great career, a loving boyfriend, and a tidy apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side. You would never guess that Kim grew up behind the closed doors of her family's idyllic Long Island house, navigating between teetering stacks of aging newspapers, broken computers, and boxes upon boxes of unused junk festering in every room—the product of her father's painful and unending struggle with hoarding. In this moving coming-of-age story, Kim brings to life her rat-infested home, her childhood consumed by concealing her father's shameful secret from friends, and the emotional burden that ultimately led to an attempt to take her own life. And in beautiful prose, Miller sheds light on her complicated yet loving relationship with her parents that has thrived in spite of the odds. *Coming Clean* is a story about recognizing where we come from and the relationships that define us—and about finding peace in the homes we make for ourselves.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Growing up as the child of severe hoarders, the author of *Coming Clean: A Memoir* describes in great detail what that was like for her. In her narrative voice that felt like a conversation, she revealed

how her home was not just an embarrassment that she had to keep secret, but that sometimes the house was festering with the detritus of the clutter until pipes burst, mold grew, rats proliferated throughout, and at one time, a homeless person was living in their attic, unbeknownst to them. One side effect for the author was how socially isolated she was....and I felt such compassion as I read about how she found a way to role play the kind of person she wanted to be through acting, and even by emulating those whose behavior she wanted to incorporate into her own. Health problems made it imperative for long term changes in the living conditions, but after cleaning up repeatedly over the years, moving her parents to new places, and even hiring people to clean....none of these actions solved the problem permanently. At that point, Miller began researching the condition of hoarding and learned a lot about the childhoods of those with the condition. Now a successful writer and actress living in Manhattan, Miller describes honestly and with great understanding of herself and her parents the small changes that have occurred over the years...perhaps because she finally detached. She was also able to create her own nest and develop a relationship that was satisfying for her. One point she emphasized: no matter how frustrated and angry she occasionally got with her parents, she always loved them and knew that they loved her. In many ways, the bond between them grew despite the horrific events of their lives together. Five stars.

I've often thought that some members of my mother's side of the family might be hoarders. They collect things in large quantities and have items tucked into strange places that they never knew they had. I find that I have ended up with piles and piles of books that I will never have time to read and subscribe to more magazines than I will ever have time to read and have enough "extra" shampoo lying around that I will probably never have to buy it again. However, after reading this book I know that no one in my family is a true hoarder. The author, who grew up as the only child of a father who was a hoarder and a mother who enabled his hoarding describes a new house the family purchased that slowly, over the course of her adolescent years became unlivable. The boiler broke but her parents were too embarrassed to have someone in to see their filth so it was never repaired and they didn't have hot water. The kitchen was so dirty that they could not have fresh food because of all of the bugs and so only ate take out or food that was sealed. The pipes leaked and the floor developed a squishy texture of water and debris. Clearly, I do not know any hoarders. I know people who enjoy stuff. People a bit more like the author's mother who takes refuge during her depression in the thrill of online shopping. But not hoarders, who are willing sacrifice their health, their safety and the safety of their children to surround themselves in ever growing piles of stuff. The thing that really impressed me about this book is that Miller managed to describe the horrors of

growing up with her parents and the continued frustration of her father's mental illness, while at the same time making a very convincing case that her parents were caring and loving people who did the best job they could raising her. Miller does not try to villainize her parents. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes autobiographies as well as anyone who is interested in mental illness.

This was an absolutely amazing memoir that was pretty much perfect as far as memoirs go. I think what I loved most about it was her attitude. She wasn't self-focused, she didn't feel sorry for herself, she presented every side of the story fairly and was just humbly honest. Her writing is also amazing and keeps you constantly engaged, caring deeply about all of the people involved, and wanting to know what happens next. There was never a point that I got bored or wanted to put the book down. I read the whole thing in two days. It was also enlightening to read about hoarding as a pathological condition since I've never really been exposed to it at that type of extreme. I had no idea people lived like that or struggled with hoarding in that way. I'd heard of the TV show Hoarders (which is not affiliated with the book in any way) but have never watched it. One of the things I think she explains the best is the cycle that people get trapped in when they have struggles like this (think alcoholism, drug addiction, etc.). She describes the codependent cycle pretty much perfectly, and describes why it's so hard to break. You don't walk away from it blaming anyone or feeling sorry for anyone, just appreciating a family's story and the struggles they faced. The other thing I love about it is that even though it's a very deep book, the topic itself isn't inherently disturbing so I feel really comfortable recommending it to people (as opposed to *Etched in Sand* or *Another Forgotten Child*, which focus on physical child abuse for example). It's a deep book, but it's also easy to read and relate to. I can't recommend it highly enough.

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