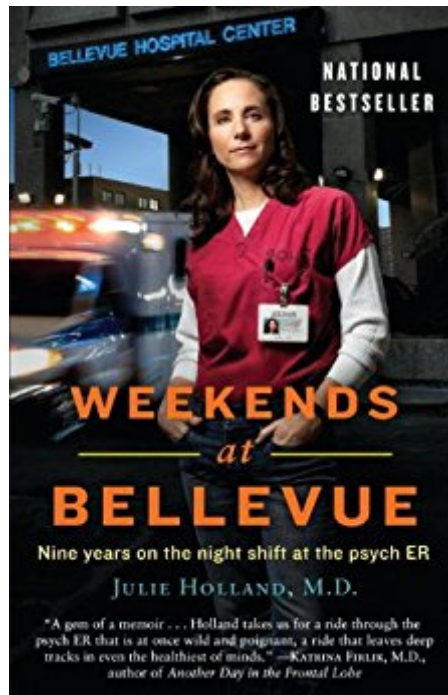


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Weekends At Bellevue: Nine Years On The Night Shift At The Psych ER



Synopsis

NATIONAL BESTSELLER Julie Holland thought she knew what crazy was. Then she came to Bellevue. For nine eventful years, Dr. Holland was the weekend physician in charge of the psychiatric emergency room at New York City's Bellevue Hospital. In this absorbing memoir, Holland recounts stories from her vast case files that are alternately terrifying, tragically comic, and profoundly moving: the serial killer, the naked man barking like a dog in Times Square, the schizophrenic begging for an injection of club soda to quiet the voices in his head, the subway conductor who watched a young woman pushed into the path of his train. Writing with uncommon candor, Holland supplies not only a page-turner with all the fast-paced immediacy of a TV medical drama but also a fascinating glimpse into the inner lives of doctors who struggle to maintain perspective in a world where sanity is in the eye of the beholder.

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Customer Reviews

In failing to address the many compelling and crucial aspects of psychiatry (the question of free will in the context of severe mental illness; the legal, ethical, and practical issues about involuntary

commitment and the mentally ill homeless; how & why people become ill and problems of recovery; & so on --- basically all the questions you want to explore if you chose this topic), Holland inadvertently answers the question of why we have so many mentally ill homeless: because of abusive workers like her who inspired the Patients Rights movement & deinstitutionalization (pardon the automated spelling error- my kindle won't let me correct it, but I'm referring to the dismantling of the asylum system in the US in the 1960s). This should also answer people's questions about why many people fear and mistrust psych hospitals. While she presents this rather choppy and disjointed memoir as a tale of how she lost her soul thru her exposure to relentless dehumanization & despair, it's pretty obvious from the start that she was drawn to the field as an adrenaline junkie, not so much out of empathy (though she makes some melodramatic stabs at it). Part of me feels we need these types to take dangerous jobs (police, military combat), but then you get detached adventurers working in highly sensitive, volatile situations-- which is surely a recipe for disaster. It's also obvious she is like many doctors we've all had -- upper middle class (or aspiring to be) people drawn to a high-status, highly paid profession-- fairly competent academics with downright (can't say it) terrible interpersonal skills. As someone who has worked with doctors and the homeless, not to mention having had a few turns as a "customer" of emergency psych services that Holland works in, I was excited to find this book, and I did appreciate that she explored the topic of how being around the severely mentally ill (and sometimes dangerously pathological) can affect you. I too have had that gallows humor (that's a very tricky subject, and not as black and white of an issue as some think)- for me, it's a big coping mechanism, but you can cross the line where it's truly corrosive to your soul. It sort of happens in stages, but Holland could've illustrated this so well and blows yet another opportunity for thoughtful inquiry and drops the ball as she's too preoccupied with her (icky) sex life and boring personal life which she strains to convince us is really rock and rolling. Maybe it was fun for her, but as a reader, it was shallow and dull. Probably because she seems oddly uninsightful for a psychologist-- I understand that as a memoir, the author's emotions take center stage but she seems very UN- curious for a professional whose entire motivation is about asking how/why/what makes people tick. But that's where her misguided careerism comes in. One thing of note: in the Afterward, she acknowledges an editor who got her to remove "provocative and objectionable stories"--- so it actually got worse than her anally ahhh..."examining"(?????) a patient -- but it got scrapped. So if you find this version repellent, keep in mind this is the Cleaned Up version. Jesus....So why 3 stars? Firstly- the subject is so important, and at least she's fairly honest, and you do get a fair sense of what Bellevue or many urban psych wards are probably like. Also, she does have a heartbreaking section on a famous case of a man who killed a woman while unmedicated.

However, again she drops the ball on an opportunity to explore these issues in depth--- very crucial issues, not just interesting ones. Finally, her sexcapades (sorry- couldn't stop myself from using that tabloid word---this is a tabloid-ish book) reminded me of graffiti I once saw in a medical center, /teaching hospital bathroom: the first comment said "we need condoms in the nurses' station!!!" The second comment replied "some of us are actually WORKING here". Holland would be that first commenter, which leaves the reader to wonder what the (expletive here) she was doing on some of those shifts--- I get that it's a high stress job, but it's not like a couple of teenagers working at Pizza Hut. I also understand why I felt like a lab rat, somebody's homework sloppily executed, when I was treated at that teaching hospital. Thanks for the unintended lesson, Doctor.

This story lacks clarity and direction. I stopped reading closer to the end because I couldn't take it anymore.

Weekends at Bellevue is a real, no-holds barred look into the Psych ER of Bellevue. It reads like a documentary without the medical jargon and redundant pop psychology. The writer, Julie Holland a punk-rocker turned wife and mother, tells it like is in the real world as a psychiatrist in the Psych ER. The chapters transition beautifully, each one more captivating than the last; you can't help but keep reading. The many detailed accounts of patients are insightful, graphic, realistic and will grab your attention until the very end. Her own personal struggles as a daughter, mother, friend and psychiatrist shadow her nine years at Bellevue. Holland brings a sense of humor to the fast-paced, highly stressful career which some readers will view as cold hearted, harsh or in bad taste - in reality, she is simply human. She proves that not all psychiatrists walk a straight line; she is spunky, she has flaws - flaws that she identifies and struggles with as many of us do. It is evident that after nearly a decade at Bellevue hospital, Holland has desensitized herself to the environment of Bellevue. She maintains strong boundaries between her career and work life, and at times she can come off as emotionless. However, it is her humor and will to separate her emotions that allow her to do her job well. Much like Bellevue Psych ER, this book never has a dull moment. For psychology students, such as myself, this book gives an insightful look into the field of psychiatry that cannot be obtained by sitting in a classroom. Julie Holland's accounts for the nine years on the night shift at the psych ER have influenced not only my perspective on the field of psychiatry itself, but how I view patients as well.

I bought this as a gift for my prison psychologist friend and she loves it. The way she writes actually

"speaks to" the reader rather than "at" the reader.

For the most part I really enjoyed Weekends at Bellevue. The parts about the inner workings of the CPEP and hospital, and the conflicts among staff members gave a good reality to it. Some of it is very sad, mostly the part dealing with the death of her friend and mentor. A lot of other reviewers criticized Dr. Holland, saying she is a mean person and they would never want to have her as their doctor. To me it shows her human side, that doctors have feelings and are human just as much as the average person. My biggest complaint about the book is there is no table of contents. It jumps around all over the place and is hard to keep up with at times. Some of the stories like her sexual encounters in residency are just filler material and too much information in my book.

Even though I sort of didn't like Dr. Holland's attitude at times, it was still very insightful to the issues facing doctors in the primary care field. It also showed me that in order to be a good provider you must understand yourself and deal with your issues first before taking care of the patients or you will project your emotions on to them. This made me reflect on myself and helped me grow as a person.

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