



Weekends at Bellevue: Nine Years on the Night Shift at the Psych ER

By Julie Holland

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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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Exclusive: Julie Holland on *Weekends at Bellevue*

No one is immune from mental illness. After working at New York City's Bellevue Hospital for nine years, as the psychiatrist in charge of admissions at the psych E.R. on Saturday and Sunday nights, I came away knowing this for sure. Over the years, I admitted heiresses and art dealers, altar boys and college students, homecoming queens, studio executives, bankers, lawyers, correction officers, and the list goes on. No matter who you are, what you do for a living, how much money you have in the bank, or how often you go to church, circumstances can transpire that will bring you to Bellevue. This is one of the hardest lessons for our patients to learn.



My years at Bellevue taught me many things, life lessons I could never have hoped to receive elsewhere, but the main take-home message was this: cherish your sanity, for it can be lost in the blink of an eye. Sometimes I saw the same patients repeatedly, alcoholics and addicts who were hitting bottom in regular cycles, showing up when their funds ran out. Other times, however, I met patients with no psychiatric history, who ended up at Bellevue when a bad break-up led to a suicide attempt, or a shared cigarette at a bar led to a PCP-induced psychosis. There are so many ways in which a life can suddenly unravel, and many of my patients could specify just when that started to happen for them--whether it was joining the army, leaving home for college, or living through the death of their child.

Many of the people I encountered at Bellevue tried strenuously to convince me that they did not belong there. Or vice versa. A big part of my job was learning how to separate the genuinely disturbed from the fakers (some people actually wanted to be admitted to Bellevue, if only for the promise of a clean bed and three meals a day), and to identify the people who had been misunderstood, misdiagnosed, who weren't mentally ill at all. After a few years of Bellevue experiences under my belt, I developed a sixth sense for what real crazy looked like, sounded like, and yes, smelled like. One night a young man was brought in to the E.R. because he was found on a street corner preaching to passersby to give up their worldly possessions. I knew enough to listen and wait, and not rush to judgment, even though it might have seemed a no-brainer to admit him. Once I was able to draw him out, I learned that he had taken psychedelic mushrooms and then spent time in a Chelsea art gallery known as COSM, which I myself had been to and knew to be an intense, inspirational and potentially overwhelming experience, something that might well unhinge a person on mind-altering drugs. I spoke with him gently as his trip slowly ebbed, helping him to navigate his re-entry in the city hospital where he had landed with no money or identification. He stayed in touch with me for months afterwards, grateful that I was there to protect him when he soared--however briefly--beyond the boundaries of normal behavior.

There is a diaphanous membrane between sane and insane. It is the flimsiest of barriers, and because any one of us can break through at any time, it terrifies us, causing us to turn our backs on those who remind us of this painful reality. But spending so much time with people who marched out of the lockstep of sanity has made me less forgiving of the way the mentally ill are ostracized and shunned. We owe them something better. And we should remember that the barrier separating "them" from "us" is not nearly as secure as we

might think.--*Julie Holland*

From Publishers Weekly

In this disjointed memoir, Holland describes her nine-year odyssey as a doctor on the night shift at New York City's Bellevue hospital, a name that has become synonymous with insanity. Holland met a bewildering assortment of drunks, sociopaths, schizophrenics and homeless people malingering in hope of a warm place to crash. As the physician in charge of the psychiatric emergency room, the hard-boiled Holland acted as gatekeeper, deciding who would be sent upstairs to the psych ward, to Central Booking or back to the streets. The book also covers Holland's personal life from her student days as a wannabe rock star to her psychotherapy sessions, her sexual escapades and her marriage and birth of her children. Holland captures the rhythms and routines of the E.R. with its unbearable suffering, petty jealousies and gallows humor. She is less successful at maintaining any kind of narrative continuity. Chapters generally run only a couple of pages and often depict random anecdotes that most likely sound better than they read. (*Oct.*)

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Review

"A gem of a memoir . . . Holland takes us for a ride through the psych ER that is at once wild and poignant, a ride that leaves deep tracks in even the healthiest of minds."—Katrina Firlik, M.D., author of *Another Day in the Frontal Lobe*

"An extraordinary insider's look at the typical days and nights of that most extraordinary place, written with a rare combination of toughness, tenderness, and outrageous humor."—Andrew Weil, M.D.

"Unforgettable . . . tells a mean story."—*New York Daily News*

"The tension between [Holland's] macho swagger and her shame at the harsh way she occasionally treats patients gives this memoir extra intrigue."—*Psychology Today*

"A fascinating portrait . . . Holland is a good storyteller with a dark wit."—*New York Post*

"Equal parts affecting, jaw-dropping, and engrossing."—*Booklist*

"In *Weekends at Bellevue* [Julie Holland] tells the story of her own journey through medical school, residency, and beyond, and at the same time gives us startling insights into minds so damaged, human beings rendered so helpless by their own demons, that entities resembling souls can't help but shine through. It's a thrilling and meaningful trip. As I turned the pages I found myself thinking, over and over, Oh, poor novelist that you are, you really can't make this stuff up." —Michael Cunningham, author of *The Hours* and *Specimen Days*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christina Evert:

What do you think of book? It is just for students since they are still students or that for all people in the world, what best subject for that? Only you can be answered for that issue above. Every person has distinct personality and hobby per other. Don't to be pressured someone or something that they don't would like do that. You must know how great in addition to important the book *Weekends at Bellevue: Nine Years on the*

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Daniel Gomez:

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Kenneth Kan:

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