

Life Inside: A Memoir

Mindy Lewis

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life inside

a memoir



MINDY LEWIS

"[A] moving, poignant and entrancing, yet redemptive account of one woman's refusal to accept victimization . . . powerfully told in vivid, poetic prose."
—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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Mindy Lewis : Life Inside: A Memoir before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Life Inside: A Memoir:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. For those readers who have not had personal experiences with psychiatric hospitals this book will tell you what it's like...By Scott BenowitzFor those of you who have ever either been patients in psychiatric hospitals or psychiatric units of hospitals, or who have had family members or friends who were patients in psychiatric hospitals, you'll likely very readily be able to easily relate to a lot of the events that Mindy

describes in this memoir. For those readers who have not had personal experiences with psychiatric hospitals or with psychiatric units in hospitals, this book will do a pretty good job of describing to you what it's like. Fortunately, in the 21st century, hospital stays are now far shorter than they were back in the 1960's when Mindy's memoir begins, but the blatant and reckless disregard for every last shred of common sense which seems so prevalent in psychiatry has changed impressively and frighteningly little. Please not that Mindy is NOT suggesting that all hospitals are entirely useless for all patients under all circumstances, she does point out that for people with severe mental illnesses, there may sometimes be no other alternatives. Mindy describes the kind of damage that hospitals can do to people whose problems are mild enough that they can probably be more effectively addressed on an outpatient basis. Specifically, Mindy does a beautiful job of describing how some (not all) psychiatrists tend to misinterpret some very normal behaviors as being symptomatic of serious problems, and she also does a beautiful job of describing how removing people from the world that they live in and forcing them to live in a confined environment can often create more problems than doing so will solve. "Life Inside: A Memoir" is very eloquently written as well as very thoroughly researched, Mindy recounts her story very gracefully for the readers. I can't say anymore without revealing too many details of her story, so I do highly recommend Mindy's book. Her story is filled with a lot of sad events, but it does end on a hopeful note. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I couldn't finish for my own state of mind. By Lori Anderson I got 75% through the book when I had to stop for my own mental health. I have depression, so I'm not insensitive to how difficult life is with it. But there never seemed to be any joy at all that wasn't turned into a disaster. I feel for her, and she's a competent author, but I felt despair eat me up every page. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Inspirational and Important By Rachel Sara Karyo Once I started reading Life Inside, I could not put it down. The vivid, intimate writing transported me completely. Mindy Lewis' memoir paints a clear picture of everyday life on the fifth-floor ward of the NY State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. Life Inside also dramatizes a sensitive teenage girl's coming of age during the turbulent 1960s. The second half of the memoir, "Life After," discusses the particular challenges of adjusting to life outside, after twenty-eight months of hospitalization. Throughout Life Inside, Mindy Lewis faces painful memories openly and honestly, and I admire her courage. She is a strong, hopeful and determined individual, and her memoir offers much inspiration. It also raises important questions about the nature of human emotions and the dangers of unchecked institutional authority. Ultimately, Life Inside celebrates the healing powers of art, music and literature, of self-reflection and friendship.

The patient is an ascetically pretty 15-year-old white female. She is intelligent, fearful, extremely anxious, and depressed. Her rage is poorly controlled and inappropriately expressed. Diagnostic Impression: Program for social recovery in a supportive and structured environment appears favorable. Life Inside In 1967, three months before her sixteenth birthday, Mindy Lewis was sent to a state psychiatric hospital by court order. She had been skipping school, smoking pot, and listening to too much Dylan. Her mother, at a loss for what else to do, decided that Mindy remain in state custody until she turned eighteen and became a legal, law-abiding, "healthy" adult. Life Inside is Mindy's story about her coming-of-age during those tumultuous years. In honest, unflinching prose, she paints a richly textured portrait of her stay on a psychiatric ward -- the close bonds and rivalries among adolescent patients, the politics and routines of institutional life, the extensive use of medication, and the prevalence of life-altering misdiagnoses. But this memoir also takes readers on a journey of recovery as Lewis describes her emergence into adulthood and her struggle to transcend the stigma of institutionalization. Bracingly told, and often terrifying in its truths, Life Inside is a life-affirming memoir that informs as it inspires.

From Publishers Weekly In the tradition of *Girl, Interrupted* and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, Lewis details her often harrowing experiences as an adolescent trapped in a psychiatric hospital and her more than 30-year recovery and redemption from having been diagnosed schizophrenic at age 15. Skipping school, experimenting with drugs and raging against an overbearing mother were Lewis's rather typical acts of 1960s-style rebellion, yet they earned her 28 months of institutionalization and intensive regimens of psychotropic medication. During her hospitalization, Lewis was kept in pajamas (to discourage escape attempts), which only encouraged sexual experimentation with other patients. Suicide attempts were rife, too, and several of her closest friends succeeded. Lewis broke free from this maelstrom at age 18, when she could no longer be held against her will. She attended college, tried various therapies, joined the Mental Patients Liberation Project, and developed long-dormant artistic skills. She also found herself caring for her dying father. Jobs came and went, as did her depression and anger, yet the will to survive never abandoned her. In the spirit of the work of R.D. Laing and Thomas Szasz, Lewis's story calls into question the very definition of mental illness and the system that makes such determinations. After accessing her medical records with the diagnosis of chronic schizophrenia she declared, "I do not believe it. I was never schizophrenic. Not then, not now." Now a visual artist and writer, Lewis provides a moving, poignant and enraging, yet redemptive, account of one woman's refusal to accept victimization, powerfully told in vivid, poetic prose. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Artist and writer Lewis had a tough adolescence. At 15, she was remanded to a mental hospital and not released until she legally became an adult three years later. The first section of this intimate memoir is

an account of those years. The second section brings the story up to date, incorporating Lewis's recent exploration into her medical records and a return visit to the hospital. There she talks to a psychiatrist who tells her that chronic undifferentiated schizophrenia was "obviously an incorrect diagnosis." Lewis's first-person, present-tense writing style gives an intensely vivid picture of what it was like to come of age during those years. The author openly discusses the friendships, the politics of institutional life, the medication, the sex and dope (arranged with staff help), and the wonderful English teacher. Her occasional use of actual clinical case notes is effectively jarring and works well with the story. However, this kind of first-person narrative does not serve Lewis as well in the second part, which could have benefited from some judicious editing and narrative framing. Recommended for memoir collections in public libraries and for history of psychiatry collections. [Lewis's essays have been published in the *Lilith* magazine and appear in two recent anthologies, *Escaping the Yellow Wallpaper* and *Voices from the Couch*.-Ed.]-Mary Paumier Jones, Westminster P.L., C.--Mary Paumier Jones, Westminster P.L., COCopyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistWhen a teenage Lewis enters the adolescent ward of a New York psychiatric hospital in the late 1960s, she considers it "a badge of victory in my rebellion against my mother and the mundane conventionality I despise." In the voice of an angry teenager--"My stepfather showed up and spouted his bullshit"--Lewis describes the hippie explorations that prompt her parents to commit her to the hospital. Then she turns to her "life inside"--the doctors, the boredom, the treatments, and the other patients, with whom she freely shares sex and drugs. Lewis moves beyond other searing memoirs such as Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1993) to describe in detail her adult life after the hospital: she lives on her own, works, earns an art degree, confronts her father's death, and struggles with love and, always, with her mental fragility. Readers may lose patience with the rambling detail and sometimes self-indulgent tone, but Lewis' intimate, almost conversational prose shows the poignant specifics and enormous difficulty of her search for "wholeness--the ultimate myth." Gillian EngbergCopyright American Library Association. All rights reserved