

## **Books and Memoirs By People with Psychiatric Histories and/or Emotional Disorders**

The following books and memoirs were written by people who have experienced psychiatric experiences and/or emotional disorders. A few books were added because they cover a subject not often talked about, for example a book related to racism or physical disfigurement.

Common to all the books is the spirit of conquering troubled histories and sharing stories of how success was attained. Their words bring to life bearing witness to their challenges.

Some stories are, in part, politically motivated on changing or altering or even abolishing the system as was true of early militants in the seventies. Others charter their course towards recovery who may or may not have received mental health services as part of their journey. Peer support rings true in all the stories.

Books are categorized as to whether they are memoirs, poetry or resources related to the arts. There is another category for research on brain/body healing through art that has a singular page as we anticipate that this will be a growing category.

Most of these books you can find on books listings such as Amazon or Thrift Books, and others. Googling the word Mad surprisingly brought up a whole new set of books focused on Madness—(Biblio Vault). Check it out!

Be inspired by the stories in these books and memoirs. The stories are life changers for all of us seeking hope and freedom, justice, and recovery. You may be motivated to write your own memoir!

[Learn More](#) |

### **Mind on Fire: A Memoir of Madness and Recovery**

by Arnold Thomas Fanning (2019)

Fanning has produced a beautifully written, devastatingly intense account of madness—and recovery, to the point where he has not had any serious illness for over a decade and has become an acclaimed playwright. Fanning conveys the consciousness of a person living with mania, psychosis and severe depression with startling precision and intimacy. *Mind on Fire* is the gripping, sometimes harrowing, and ultimately uplifting testament of a person who has visited hellish regions of the mind.

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### **The Hospital Always Wins: A Memoir**

by Issa Ibrahim (2016)

Issa Ibrahim's memoir details in searing prose his development of severe mental illness leading to a horrific family tragedy, his acquittal by reason of insanity, and his subsequent commission to a mental hospital for nearly twenty years.

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## **Finding Life Lessons in Art**

by Jerome Lawrence and Rosalynn Carter (2023)

*Finding Life Lessons in Art* by Jerome Lawrence holds a mirror to the lifelong struggles and successes in the creation of beautiful art to show how art can help in recovery and struggles when life can just feel overwhelming. Take comfort and know that life can be as beautiful as art. Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter writes a poignant description of Jerome Lawrence's book . . . "Having devoted much of my life working to help people with mental illnesses, I am constantly impressed by stories of achievement and courage . . . In his two-part book, Jerome gives us a panoramic view into the workings of his agile mind and creative genius.

[Learn More](#)

## **From Shattered to Restored: Recovering Hope. Discovering Purpose**

by Nanette V Larson (2019)

In this stunningly transparent memoir, Nanette Larson shares her journey from a life of constant hopelessness and despair, deep depression, crippling anxiety, and suicidality to one full of victorious hope and purpose. From distressed patient to nationally recognized deputy director and ambassador of Wellness & Recovery Services for the Illinois Division of Mental Health, Nanette is living proof that full recovery from mental health issues is, indeed, possible, and a successful, happy, healthy life can be found on the other side of the struggle.

[Learn More](#)

## **Growing Up Mad in the South: Stories, Poems, and Other Aberrations**

by Bonnie Henderson Schell and J. E. Harris MA (2022)

Step into the poignant and transformative journey of "Growing up Mad in the South," a captivating memoir set in Atlanta, GA during the tumultuous 1950s and '60s. Delve into a world where hidden beneath the facade of "Well bless your pea-pickin' heart," lurk the shadows of racism, sexism, and classism. Prepare to be moved as Bonnie Schell fearlessly confronts the expectations of "Should," the stifling demand to "Bite Your Tongue," amid the privilege of "White Only," Normal Only, and Prosperous Only. Bonnie has been involved in our consumer/survivor movement for many years.

[Learn More](#)

## **Heartbeats of Hope: The Empowerment Way to Recover**

by Daniel Fisher (2017)

"The book is about how I went from saying "no" to life to saying "yes" to life. I recovered by learning the language of my heartbeats- the heartbeats of my emotions and my life. I hope for a day when...Every person who experiences extreme emotional states is engaged in respectful, hopeful, humanistic, and empowering relationships that enable them to heal and recover full, meaningful lives in the community. ...Instead of being seen as threats to society, we will be seen as a source of wisdom that we have obtained through our recovery."

The book is part memoir and part dialogue as a method of healing: *Learning Empowering Dialogue through Emotional CPR.*

[Learn More](#)

## **The Lives They Left Behind: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic**

by Peter Stastny, Darby Penney, et al. (2014)

More than four hundred abandoned suitcases filled with patients' belongings were found when Willard Psychiatric Center closed in 1995 after 125 years of operation. They are skillfully examined here and compared to the written record to create a moving—and devastating—group portrait of twentieth-century American psychiatric care.

[Learn More](#)

## **On Our Own Together: Peer Programs for People with Mental Illness**

by Sally Clay (2005)

On Our Own Together describes the inner workings of eight successful peer-run services for mental health consumers, including drop-in centers, educational programs, and peer support/mentoring programs. Written by people who developed such programs, it reveals these services as a valuable resource within the mental health system and a precious necessity for many consumers.

[Learn More](#)

## **On Our Own**

by Judi Chamberlin (1978)

Judi Chamberlin's book is about psychiatry and alternatives to it from a "Patients" point of view. The story explores her experiences while being a patient as well as the lessons she learned while using services controlled by patients themselves. The book is a manifesto for patients (consumer survivor-ex patients) and influenced changes in the mental health establishment. Judi is considered the Mother of our consumer/survivor movement. Her book should be in all of our peer program libraries, read by any peer who is interested in our history and particularly peers learning to be peer specialists

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## **Mud Flower: Surviving Schizophrenia and Suicide Through Art**

Meghan J.M. Caughey (2021)

*Mud Flower: Surviving Schizophrenia and Suicide Through Art* shows the perspective of a person who has a serious mental illness, who survives extreme treatments, whose family and the health system have given up on, but who defies all expectations and common beliefs of what is possible. Along the way, the author describes the role of art in her survival, grappling with how the lifeforce can be either nurtured or destroyed by elements in our environment, such as nature, beauty, and art versus dehumanization and coercion.

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## **Soldier Hogs**

by Refried Bean (2021)

This book is a chapter book about groundhogs fighting a paint war against shadow monsters in Sweet Grief Canyon. It also includes an essay about depression and mental health, as well as acknowledgments for Facebook friend raffle winners. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100087567445290>

[Second Thin Book Series \(13 books\)](#)

This is a second series of thin books, slightly punchier than the original thin books, great for teens and college kids, young adults, or people looking for a cheap, entertaining but thought-provoking read. Some books have poems and blog posts, some have stories and jokes or memes, and some have illustrations.

[On Amazon](#)

## **Ten Days in A Mad-House: Illustrated and Annotated: A First-Hand Account of Life at Bellevue Hospital on Blackwell's Island in 1887**

by Nellie Bly (2017)

*Ten Days in A Mad-House* Was Written by Nellie Bly in 1887, after she lived, undercover, at a women's insane asylum at Blackwell's Island in 1887 for ten days. This was an assignment given to her by Joseph Pulitzer. The living conditions and treatment of the Patients were Horrible. Bly Wrote:

“The insane asylum on Blackwell's Island is a human rattrap. It is easy to get in, but once there it is impossible to get out.”

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## **Letters From the Looney Bin**

By Thatcher C. Nalley (2013)

In the late 1970s the Emerson Rose Asylum became completely abandoned—all the patients, doctors, staff, vanished and were never seen again. The events circling this mass exodus have been one of the most baffling disappearances in history. Until now. A stack of bundled letters was found inside a tattered asylum mattress during the Emerson demolition. These letters, all addressed to the pseudonym, Dr. Quill, were written by the patients as they documented the demise of the Emerson Rose Asylum.

[Learn More](#)

## **Solito: A Memoir**

by Javier Zamora and Random House Audio (2022)

A memoir as gripping as it is moving, *Solito* provides an immediate and intimate account not only of a treacherous and near-impossible journey, but also of the miraculous kindness and love delivered at the most unexpected moments. *Solito* is Javier Zamora's story, but it's also the story of millions of others who had no choice but to leave home.

[Learn More](#)

## **You Don't Know Crazy**

by Wambui Bahati (2008)

Wambui Bahati, a.k.a. John-Ann Washington, shares a powerful, personal and important story about mental illness, self-esteem, self-love and courage. She was born and raised in the segregated south during the 1950s and 1960s and has sprinkled the narrative with significant national historical events, and how they personally affected her life. She invites us in for a behind the scenes look at her years as an actress on Broadway and in national touring shows. At times hilariously funny and always relentlessly honest

[Learn More](#)

## **Inverse Cowgirl**

by Alicia Weigel (2023)

Two percent of the world's population—the same percentage of humans who have naturally red hair—are born intersex. Yet many people aren't even familiar with the word. Alicia Weigel is fighting back against hate and fearmongering to protect the rights and lives of everyone. In this book, she boldly speaks about working as a change agent in a state that actively attempts to pass legislation that would erase her existence, explores how we can reclaim bodily autonomy, and encourages us to amplify our voices to be heard. Disarming, funny, charming, and powerful, this is a vital account of personal accomplishment that will open eyes and change minds.

[Learn More](#)

## **The Girl Who Cried Wolf**

Nancy Jensen (Author), Nathan P. Swink Ph.D. (Author) (2013)

The Girl Who Cried "Wolf!" is the heroic story of Nancy Jensen's journey through mental illness to recovery. A challenging family life combined with further challenges in school left her searching for God and family elsewhere. Her search led her to Newton, Kansas, where she found a home first in a communal church before she spent over a year at Kaufman House which was not the place it purported to be. She was the girl who cried "Wolf!"

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## **Autobiography of a Face**

By Lucy Grealy (1994)

"I spent five years of my life being treated for cancer, but since then I've spent 15 years being treated for nothing other than looking different from everyone else. It was the pain from that, from feeling ugly, that I always viewed as the greatest tragedy of my life. The fact that I had cancer seemed minor in comparison." At age nine, Lucy Grealy was diagnosed with a potentially terminal cancer. When she returned to school with a third of her jaw removed, she faced the cruel taunts of classmates. In this strikingly candid memoir, Grealy tells her story of great suffering and remarkable strength without sentimentality and with considerable wit.

[Learn More](#)

## **The Day the Voices Stopped**

by Ken Steele (2002)

For thirty-two years Ken Steele lived with the devastating symptoms of schizophrenia, tortured by inner voices commanding him to kill himself, ravaged by the delusions of paranoia, barely surviving on the ragged edges of society. In this powerful and inspiring story, Steele tells the story of his hard-won recovery from schizophrenia and how activism and advocacy helped him regain his sanity and go on to give hope and support to so many others like him. His recovery began with a small but intensely dramatic moment.

[Learn More](#)

## **May Cause Side Effects: A Memoir**

by Brooke Siem, Candace Joice, et al. (2022)

Unfurled against a global backdrop, *May Cause Side Effects* is the gripping story of what happened when, after fifteen years and 32,760 pills, Brooke was faced with a profound choice that plunged her into a year of excruciating antidepressant withdrawal and forced her to rebuild her entire life.

[Learn More](#)

## **When Breath Becomes Air**

By Paul Kalanithi (2016)

This inspiring, exquisitely observed memoir finds hope and beauty in the face of insurmountable odds as an idealistic young neurosurgeon attempts to answer the question: What makes a life worth living?

[Learn More](#)

# Poetry

## **AW Shucks! My Brain is Playing Tricks on Me**

by Summer Breeze (2017)

A collection of poems documenting the author's battle with mental illness. This poetical memoir traces her journey from psychiatric diagnosis to living in mental health recovery.

[Learn More](#)

## **Lantern to my Soul**

by Gayle Bluebird (2023)

Bluebird's poems flow melodically with intriguing word combinations you will enjoy. She wrote these poems because they tell her how to enjoy simple things in life and to appreciate nature. Now at 80, she admits she has reached old age but not in any way deterring her from adventures. She inspires other "oldies" to be adventurous as well. Poetry, she believes, is one of the best ways for us to love ourselves, to communicate more honestly, to take risks and can be what holds us together and embraces us. She finds her religion one day standing under a canopy of trees with birds trilling their songs. This, she decides is church.

[Learn More](#)

## **We Mad Climb Shaky Ladders**

by Pamela Spiro Wagner (2009)

"...The word 'mad' may conjure up notions that are either arty or primitive. Neither would apply in this case. One of the more stunning qualities of these poems is their composure, their lack of interest in histrionics. The poet's ability to examine her behavior is both edifying and harrowing. A poem such as "Offering," that speaks to the narrator's burning herself with a lighted cigarette, is remarkable in its ability to turn and turn again as it considers the behavior...One realizes that once this poem was written this poet could write any poem because she has the ability to indulge metaphor yet not let up a jot on the terror of real circumstances. Whatever else has befallen her, in her poems she seems incapable of backing down..." —Baron Wormser

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## **The Awakenings Review**, vol. 6, no. 2, Fall 2015 Single Issue Magazine

by Robert K. Lundin (Author)

The Awakenings Review publishes original poetry, short stories, dramatic scenes, essays, creative non-fiction, photographs, excerpts from larger work and cover art—all related by persons who have had a personal experience with mental illness.

Contributors selected for publication are not paid for their work. However they will receive a complimentary copy when their work is published. The journal is published twice a year.

Send an inquiry to [AR@awakeningsproject.org](mailto:AR@awakeningsproject.org)

[Learn More](#)

## **Memories of Psychosis: Poems on the Mental Distress**

by Neesa Sunar (2019)

Neesa Sunar is a survivor of mental distress experiences related to schizoaffective disorder, depression and anxiety. Her poems immerse the reader in the minds of people suffering, thus imparting first-hand experience. Neesa works as a mental health peer specialist, where she publicly discloses her lived experience with having a disability to benefit others. She also is a graduate student of social work, and is expected to graduate in December 2019. She is the founder and head admin of a mental health wellness group on Facebook, called "What is Wellness? A Mental Health Discussion Group."

[Learn More](#)

## **Straight Jacket**

by Jessica Lowell Mason (2019)

The poems of *Straight Jacket* gather bravely at the intersection between LGBTQ identity and the politics of illness and speak to the consequences of homophobia and social injustice. The book takes readers into the horrors of being committed into a mental hospital and does fierce linguistic battle with stigma, offering witness to failures within the mental health system and demonstrating expressions of the indomitable spirit's restlessness in times of helplessness and adversity. The collection chronicles in a personal way the oppressive experiences of dehumanization and institutionalization.

[Learn more](#)

## **Poetry for Personal Power (Facebook Page)**

We do health care messaging, artist entrepreneurship, and peer support.

We promote substance use recovery, mental health resilience, health insurance literacy, and other health topics at poetry slams. Artists build their business careers by tapping into the health care funding stream. Artist teams become peer support programs.

Peer support is good for substance use recovery, mental health, and criminal justice re-integration.

[Learn More](#)

## **Footfalls**

By James Eret 2015

Selected poetry by an established San Diego author and artist. This carefully curated collection explores a spectrum of subjects, from the writer's Vietnam experiences to his favorite hobby of bird watching and the detritus of growing up in a large family.

[Learn More](#)

## **Resources:**

### **Living Into Wholeness Guidebook**

by Deborah Trueheart (2023)

*Living into Wholeness* is a course for healing trauma through wholeness-based practices and principles. It is a process of learning to align with and trust the larger, creative LIFE FORCE flowing through, sourcing your life with everything you need in every moment. You are invited to enter the mystery and mastery of the intrinsic wisdom in your own being. Learn to access your intrinsic state of wholeness, divinity and perfection and release the old patterns that block your authentic state of joy, openness, trust, freedom, and vitality.

Available at National Empowerment Center: [Power2u.org](http://Power2u.org)

[Learn More](#)

## **Illness and the Art of Creative Self-Expression: Stories and Exercises from the Arts for Those with Chronic Illness**

by John Graham-Pole (Author), Patch Adams (2000)

In this unique, inspiring guide to holistic healing, a controversial advocate of alternative medicine urges readers to sing, dance, paint, act, write, and play their way to good health.

[Learn More](#)

## **Glass Book Project**

Founder/Artist; Nick Kline (2017)

Literally. books made of glass, GlassBook Project is a collaborative project with visiting artists, students and community members that create artist books inspired by a trauma informed perspective, 2009-2017.

[Learn More](#)

## **Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives**

by Louise Desalvo (2000)

In this inspiring book, based on her twenty years of research, highly acclaimed author and teacher Louise DeSalvo reveals the healing power of writing. DeSalvo shows how anyone can use writing as a way to heal the emotional and physical wounds that are an inevitable part of life. DeSalvo's program is based on the best available and most recent scientific studies about the efficacy of using writing as a restorative tool. With insight and wit, she illuminates how writers, from Virginia Woolf to Henry Miller to Audre Lorde to Isabel Allende, have been transformed by the writing process. Writing as a Way of Healing includes valuable advice and practical techniques to guide and inspire both experienced and beginning writers.

[Learn More](#)

## **Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World**

by Richard F. Mollica (2008) survivors and clinicians.

This book reveals how in every society we have to move away from viewing trauma survivors as "broken people" and "outcasts" to seeing them as courageous people actively contributing to larger social goals. When violence occurs, there is damage not only to individuals but to entire societies, and to the world. Through the journey of self-healing that survivors make, they enable the rest of us not only as individuals but as entire communities to recover from injury in a violent world.

[Learn More](#)

## **Creativity & Madness: Psychological Studies of Art & Artists**

by Barry Panter (1996)

In this book, eighteen mental health professionals describe the work, lives and personalities of fifteen famous artists, writers, and musicians. The lives and work of these artists illustrate that pain and turmoil do not always result in disability and disease but can lead to creativity. Artists discover transcendent paths through emotional issues with which we all struggle.

[Learn More](#)

## **Creative Healing: How to Heal Yourself by Tapping Your Hidden Creativity**

by Michael Samuels (Author), Mary Rockwood Lane (Contributor) (2011)

All across the country, a groundbreaking movement is forming in the field of health care: art and medicine are becoming one, with remarkable results. In major medical centers such as the University of Florida, Duke, University of California, and Harvard Medical School, patients confronting life-threatening illness and depression are using art, writing, music, and Dance to heal body and soul.

[Learn More](#)

## **Bedlam: An Intimate Journey into America's Mental Health Crisis**

by Kenneth Paul Rosenberg and Penguin Audio (2019)

A psychiatrist and award-winning documentarian sheds light on the mental-healthcare crisis in the United States. Dr. Rosenberg gives listeners an inside look at the historical, political, and economic forces that have resulted in the greatest social crisis of the 21st century. The culmination of a seven-year inquiry, *Bedlam* is not only a rallying cry for change, but also a guidebook for how we move forward with care and compassion, with resources that have never before been compiled, including legal advice, practical solutions for parents and loved ones, help finding community support, and information on therapeutic options.

[Learn More](#)

## **Wisdom from Peer Support Specialists and Supervisors**

by National Association of Peer Supporters (Author), Rita Cronise (Editor), Jonathan P. Edwards (Editor), Gita Enders (Editor), Joanne Forbes (Editor) (2023)

This book is about the practice of peer support from its origins in self-help to its continuing evolution as a profession. It provides some history, research, values, and guidelines of peer support brought together from conference presentations from real-world practitioners. Written by NAPS members for NAPS members and others, it aligns with foundational memes: "Nothing about us without us" and "Each one Teach one". Each chapter contains information from the front-line practitioners and peer support allies who are crafting the profession on a daily basis. The purpose of this edition is to provide one of the first guides to peer support work from a peer-led authoritative source. The field has grown rapidly with a need to provide the basic information for those entering its ranks doable.

[Learn More](#)

## **Myth, Magic, and Metaphor - A Journey into the Heart of Creativity**

by Patricia Daly-Lipe Ph.D. (2015)

This book *was not* written to provide answers. It *was* written to provoke questions and ignite the imagination while examining history, art, literature, philosophy, mathematics, and music as components of the creative process. It is a voyage of discovery, and maybe its real goal is simply the joy of knowing the journey will never end! Patricia Daly-Lipe encourages us "to experience the sense of wonder we knew as children, to use our imagination, to feel and absorb the world around us, to listen, not just to hear, to see, not just to look; in sum, to become intoxicated with life. The tool is the heart; the medium is words."

[Learn More](#)

## **Madness, Race and Insanity in Jim Crow Asylum**

By Antonia Hylton (Author) (2024)

In *Madness*, Peabody and Emmy award-winning journalist Antonia Hylton tells the 93-year-old history of Crownsville Hospital, one of the last segregated asylums with surviving records and a campus that still stands to this day in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. She blends the intimate tales of patients and employees whose lives were shaped by Crownsville with a decade-worth of investigative research and archival documents. *Madness* chronicles the stories of Black families whose mental health suffered as they tried, and sometimes failed, to find safety and dignity. In *Madness*, Hylton traces the legacy of slavery to the treatment of Black people's bodies and minds in our current mental healthcare system. It is a captivating and heartbreaking meditation on how America decides who is sick or criminal, and who is worthy of our care or irredeemable.

[Learn More](#)

## **In Our Own Voice: African American stories of oppression survival and recovery in Mental health systems**

by Vanessa Jackson (2002)

Vanessa Jackson explores the oft uncited experiences of African American psychiatric survivors and the experience of mental health treatment in America. Through her extensive research and documentation, she unpacks scientific racism, segregated hospitals, and the erasure of Black experiences in psych survivor movement (consumer, ex-patient, peers). She also explores the themes shared through oral histories around recovery and healing, and she creates a guide to support creating oral histories on other communities and strategies for using history projects as a tool for personal and community healing and social change.

[Learn More](#)

## **The Immortal Life of Henrietta Locke**

by Rebecca Skloot (Author) (2011)

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine: The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, which are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb’s effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions.

Intimate in feeling, astonishing in scope, and impossible to put down, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* captures the beauty and drama of scientific discovery, as well as its human consequences.

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