

Hanwell asylum

My name is Clara Jones I am a 25 year old mother and wife. My husband killed our beautiful son, he told everyone that I was the one who did it, to get away with it and get away from me. I got admitted to the asylum because they think im possessed. And the worst part, everyone believed him, a real man would never kill his son, would he?

I'm writing...

07:00 wake up call, the doors get unlocked.

My cell is very small everyone has their own, the staff can control us better that way. In my room is a bed, a table and a small window, it's about the size of my face. I enjoy looking outside, it looks so peaceful and calm. I've been here for years, the asylum opened it's gates in 1831, I was one of the first patients and I haven't been out since. I've made two friends in here, not many but I don't need more. One of them harmed herself very badly, she doesn't have any motivation and she's sad most of the time.(depression) The staff thinks a demon lives inside of her. The other one hears voices in his head (schizophrenia), his diagnosed reason was witchcraft. Both of the assumptions are clearly not true.

We have time to get ready, I always brush my hair and wash my face, I can't do many more things.

08:00 every patient has to be ready for breakfast, if not, one of the nurses will beat us.

We eat the same thing every day, except on Christmas, my favourite day of the year.

The food isn't good. For breakfast we get a spoon full of porridge and a piece of old, dry bread. The breakfast of today was the best I've had in a few weeks, it wasn't rotten and there were no maggots or other insects in it.

After breakfast we have to go back to our rooms for about 1 hour. When we're alone in our rooms we aren't allowed to do many things. We get books from the nuns, they are always about god.

One thing that's strictly forbidden is writing. We don't get pencils and neither do we get paper. The staff tells us that it's a waste of time to write about things. I think the real reason is that they don't want the people on the outside to know what they do to us here in the Hanwell asylum. I still managed to hide some paper and a pencil in my cell.

09:00 it's time for therapy or work, we have to do that until 5pm. I work in the bakery, most of the time the only thing we do is baking bread, we do it six days a week. We sell most of our bread, if we wouldn't do that the asylum couldn't afford any food for us.

11:00 time for therapy, we have it every single day, it's the worst part of the day. I hate it. I get treated with many different therapies. None of them have worked, which is no surprise for me because I'm not ill. Therapy is very exhausting and and harmful. It's painful but the more I have to do it the more I get used to it. I got used to the constant pain and extreme situations. I learned how to trick my body and mind, it's better that way.

My most recent form of therapy is ECT and also the reason I write down as much as I can. They know that I'm smart, I think they are afraid of me. If I will ever get out of here, they won't be open any time longer. I know too much.

ECT is electroconvulsive therapy, it means that you get electricity straight into your brain. Most of the time you're fully conscious of what's happening. At first it was one of the scariest things that have ever happened to me. The feeling of getting tied to a wooden bed with a piece of wood in your mouth to bite into. Faster than you can think you feel an enormous pain in your head, it's unbearable. The pure electricity that flows through your body is immense, the only thing you can do is scream and try to get out of the buckles that hold you down. Some people even break their bones or spine, I'm glad it never happened to me.

After therapy I get 30 minutes to rest, my whole body hurts and shakes, I have a really bad headache and I have to throw up. But the worst part of all is the memory loss, I forget so much, so much that's important, I write to remember.

After 30 minutes I feel slightly better I stopped to throw up, my head still feels like my brain exploded inside of it. The nurses don't care, as long as I can manage to sit, I have to get back to work.

05:00 its finally 5pm, work is done for today. I'm exhausted and I want to go to sleep, we are not allowed to until 8pm, the time our doors get locked again.

05:30 time for diner. For dinner we usually get a piece of bread an some sort of vegetable with a piece of meat. The meat is very old most of the times but we still eat it.

After dinner we pray for 30 minutes. When that's done we can spend some time in the big room. The big room is the only room where the patients are allowed to talk and spend time together. We have a little bird cage in there. I'm the one who has to take care of the birds, spending time with them is my favourite part of the day. They remind me of myself. Young and free, ready to explore the world but still they're stuck here in a cage, freedom nowhere to be found.

07:30 time to get ready and walk to my cell.

08:00 the doors get locked in 15 minutes the lights will be out.

08:30 the lights are out and I can't hear any footsteps, I take out my paper and write, I write down as much as possible before I have to live this life another day.

I write to remember why I won't give up.

I write to remember why I'm here.

I write that one day everyone knows how cruel it is in here.

I write because of so many more reasons but mostly,

I write to remember who I am.

Petra Huthmacher

05.10.2013

Waldhaus Chur

My name is Petra Huthmacher I am a 34 year old mother and wife. I have two daughters. My childhood wasn't easy. A lot of things happened that weren't good for my mental health. After many years of struggling I decided with my family and therapist that it's best for me to go to a mental hospital. That way I can get as much help as I need to deal with my trauma and depression.

07:00 Time to wake up. My room has a decent size, there's a bed, a table, two chairs, a closet and a bathroom. It's very bright. On one wall are pictures that my children drew for me. On the table are flowers, behind the table is a window, when I look outside I see another house and some plants, it's not the best view but sunlight finds it's way inside. In most rooms are two patients. I don't mind sharing a room, it helps to get more social.

After I get up it's time to get my medication.

07:30 We get breakfast the food is pretty good, we can choose from a few tings the day before.

08:00 I can go back to my room and get ready. I brush my teeth and take a shower, after that I like to lay down for a bit.

09:00 It's time for my first therapy session of the day. I have active therapy with a therapist.

10:00 After active therapy I have psychotherapy. Most therapy sessions take about one hour. In psychotherapy I talk about stuff that's happening in my life.

11:30 Time for lunch.

After lunch we get time to rest. Once a week we have a department meeting from 13:00-13:30. Every patient from the department has to come. In the department meeting we talk about many things.

We have to discuss who has to do which chores. We also get time to talk about what's bothering us in the group or what we're happy about. Some of the chores we have to do is watering the plants, set the table and cooking. After that we can take a break.

14:00 Time for my next therapy. It's ceramic therapy, I really like to make things out of clay. This therapy helped me and the therapist there was also very nice and understanding.

16:00 Therapy is done. I go for a walk with my reference person.

16:30 Once a week I have a meeting with my reference person. We talk about my week and we plan my next one. She figures out if something has changed and if I'm doing better. If something that we're doing is affecting me in a bad way we try to change that thing and do something else instead. After talking I get to rest for one hour. During this time I like to read or write letters. Sometimes I just lay down and do nothing. Sometimes my family visits me, we go for walks together or go to the cafeteria. On the weekend's I'm allowed to go home if I want to.

18:00 Time for dinner.

After dinner I have free time, I can choose what I want to do, but we have to stay up until 9 to take our medicine.

21:00 We get our night medication after that I go to sleep. Most of the time I'm very tired that's why I go to bed as early as possible.

ECT

First time I got treated with this therapy was in 2014. I got this therapy nearly 1-2 times a year, for the next 3-4 years. I had 6x12 sessions. At the same time I got treated with ECT therapy I had psychotherapy to watch my mental state and well-being.

I got treated in the Fontana hospital in Chur. The staff brings you to a recovery room and they let you lay down. They have to get access to the vein to inject anesthetics. They also inject saline solution because you're not allowed to drink or eat before. When it's time for my appointment the nurses bring me down to the operation room. There is a psychiatrist and an anaesthetist waiting for me. Right before the procedure I get electrodes attached to my head. After everything is prepared they flood my lungs with oxygen, that way I don't have to get oxygen during the procedure. I also get something to paralyse my muscles. During the procedure you get a safety gear for your mouth in case you would bite yourself in that time. At the same time they start to inject the anesthetics. A short time after that, you're asleep. Time to start. The doctor starts the machine and electricity goes straight through my brain. An epileptic seizure gets triggered. Doctors found out that spontaneous epileptic seizures help with mental problems. After a few minutes it's done. They take me to the recovery room. When I wake up I'm very confused. After some time it gets better. When I'm able to stand up someone takes me to a room where I get something to drink and eat. A psychiatrist asks me questions to test if I'm completely awake and to see if the procedure worked without complications. Someone of my family gets me from hospital to take me home. When I'm home I lay down, I can feel the pain in my head. During the procedure I get painkillers but it still hurts. I feel very tired and I don't have an appetite. My jaw is hurting I can barely eat anyway. My body hurts and feels very sore. After a day or two its back to normal.

After 9 sessions I finally start to feel the effect of ECT. I am happier and want to do more things. Something has changed, in a good way.

The side effect that I feel the most is my memory loss, I forgot many things. I can't remember some parts of my life, they're gone just like it never happened. I also experience loss of concentration. After receiving ECT I experienced a manic episode. A manic episode is very exhausting there are 1000 thoughts in my head at once and I have to do something constantly. My mood can change in seconds. Another side effect was a depersonalisation, it was very scary. I didn't feel like myself, it was like someone else was in my body and I was standing right next to it, I couldn't do anything about it. I got very anxious and was afraid of many things, most of them without any reason. I experienced many déjà vu's during this time.

Now it's 2021 and I'm doing great since summer 2019. I'm glad that I got treated with ECT it's the only thing that truly helped me get out of my depression. It's good to know that there is something that can help me even though I don't need it right now.

Differences

The two diary's are very different. The asylum changed in many ways. If you think about it, it was only 200 years ago but still, it was a long way to the psychiatry. Only about 70 years ago doctors and other medical workers started looking at this topic in a more critical way. It was time for change. In the 19th century mental illnesses were something bad, something that had to be kept as a secret. Could be a reason why they said it was caused by witch craft, demonic possession or other similar things. They didn't know how to treat mentally ill people, they just locked them away so that nobody could see them. The healthy people were overwhelmed by the ones who were ill. The treatments for the ill people were inhuman and brutal. They often caused death. Many people lost their life to something they couldn't control, something that was natural.

Until this day many people suffer from mental illnesses, probably about every 4th person. The way patients in mental institutions get treated changed in nearly every aspect. Some of the old therapies are still used today, they're safer now and they know more about how and why it works. New things that are normal now are psychotherapy and the right medication. Talking is one of the most important things if you have a mental illness, medical workers realised that, now it's mandatory in mental institutions.

Nowadays mental illnesses aren't a forbidden topic, it's still not talked about enough but it gets better.