

Reviews

Out of the Woods: A Journey Through Depression and Anxiety

By Brent Williams, with illustrations by Korkut Öztekin
Educational Resources. 2017. £19.95 (hb). 160 pp.
ISBN 9780473390068

This is an insightful and extremely valuable book depicting a man's journey through depression and anxiety. It is based on Brent Williams' experiences and is a deeply personal account, but is also based on sound medical science. Williams' personal experiences and the unusual graphic novel format make the book very accessible, allowing the reader to understand the experience of depression and anxiety. It is beautifully illustrated by Korkut Öztekin, with pictures which often 'say' so much more than words in terms of evoking the atmosphere and man's mood.

We journey with the man from a period of deep depression to recovery, passing through multiple steps on the way—including trying to recover alone, resisting help and later becoming open to help. The book offers an explanation as to how and why one might be feeling depressed and anxious, as well as enabling the reader to learn about the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Importantly, the story shows the reader how to take the steps towards recovery. The man is told, '[y]ou need to break the downward spiral . . . by doing lots of small and manageable things'. The reader is exposed to breathing techniques, mindfulness and the importance of nature, learning, human contact and exercise amongst other practical steps which help promote recovery.

The book also demonstrates a realistic recovery path with the ups and downs which are so typical. Most significantly, by charting the man's recovery it offers hope and demonstrates a way forward which will be helpful and comforting to those with similar problems. There are elements of the narrative which are perhaps a little alien to the National Health Service culture. Nevertheless, this is a much-needed book which will be very useful to patients and their families/friends as well as a great help to general practitioners by supporting the messages we give.

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Outside the Asylum: A Memoir of War, Disaster and Humanitarian Psychiatry

By Lynne Jones
W&N. 2018. 368 pp. £9.99 (pb). ISBN: 9781474605748

Lynne Jones has spent much of the last two decades setting up and running mental health programmes in places devastated by natural disasters and wars. Jones is a child psychiatrist, who began her career in the Allinton Psychiatric Hospital, the former Allinton Asylum. From the off, she cared more about pragmatic pacifism and 'doing the right thing', which included a commitment to living by her values of public service and altruism. She has a CV 'full of gaps': when she was at Greenham Common, Bosnia, on the Somali border in Ethiopia, in Kosovo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Tacloban, and many other places where bombs have fallen or tsunami have washed away communities. Jones says her mother thinks she is on 'an extended gap year'.

Her memoir has been compared to the writing of Oliver Sacks, which I think does them both a disservice. Jones' style and approach are different to Sack's pen portraits of neurological conundrum, although she does interlace clinical stories through her accounts. Her reminiscences of being with asylum patients on the dance floor evoke the recent work of Dr Charlie Howard, whose Music and Change project engages with teenage gangs at street level, co-producing models of care delivery.

Professionally, there is much to admire here, not least Jones' commitment to academic rigor despite being far from university departments. For instance, she describes staying on in Bosnia for an additional year after her contract had ended to study the effects of war on children. Her contributions to the intellectual, cultural and academic life in the countries she is sent to are similarly admirably. These exchanges are two-way: by spending time with communities and by listening to young people, Jones provides solutions that work for them and their families. She wears diverse theoretical cloaks lightly, using combinations of systemic family therapy, medication, group therapy and supportive counselling. Her stance is pragmatic, for example commencing a young man on medication earlier than she would like so that she can monitor the effects before her likely evacuation from the country.

Jones writes without bitterness or naivety, recognising that, as a humanitarian worker, she is sometimes a pawn in political game, for example when she is part of a wider evacuation of international aid workers and has to say hurried farewells to unwell patients and local colleagues. There must surely have been times when Jones was fatigued, professionally isolated, personally lonely. We don't hear about it. But though she is stoic, she is also angry, especially about the