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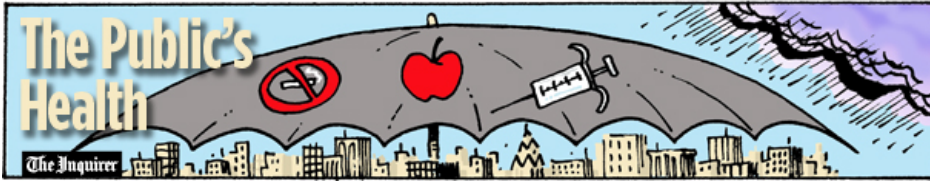
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SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 2012

'Kings Park' calls attention to continuing crisis in mental health care



Filmmaker Lucy Winer in front of Building 21 at Kings Park State Hospital, where she had been institutionalized in 1967.

Kings Park: Stories from an American Mental Institution

a deeply moving and disturbing new documentary film from director [Lucy Winer](#), will be screened this [Monday night at International House](#), 3701 Chestnut St., in West Philadelphia. If you've got plans cancel them. Go see this incredible account of the history of Long Island's Kings Park State Hospital, once one of the nation's largest mental institutions housing up to 9,000 patients. It starts at 7 p.m. (free, no tickets required; doors open at 6:30 p.m.), and will be followed by a panel discussion, including the director and several mental health experts.

This is a heartrending film, centered upon the experiences of the director herself, who, after several failed suicide attempts as a troubled teen in the late 1960s, spent 2½ years in mental institutions, including six months at Kings Park. Today, Winer is a successful documentary filmmaker, and the film, she told me, is a more than 10-year labor of love, "started as a personal venture to try to sort out a chapter in my life I had locked away." But what started as a project about personal healing also became a film about getting the public "to know what kind of crisis we have in mental health care and how we got here."

The film's most powerful moments come as Winer and other former patients, nurses, attendants, doctors and family members recount their relationship to Kings Park and its impact on their lives. For the many thousands whose lives intersected with the facility, these memories offer a glimpse into the terror and desolation that was life in a state institution. In one of the most intense moments of the film, Winer recounts one of her first days at Kings Park, when she enters the day room in the violent women's ward, seeing drugged women, many sleeping or sprawled out on the floor. She begins to cry. But quickly another patient on the ward quietly comes up to her and tells her not to cry. "Do not cry," she said, "they'll hurt you." Vulnerability was not a good option at Kings Park, where patients could be abused in myriad ways for the slightest infraction.

Kings Park is divided into three parts: "Going Back" follows the director as she revisits this very painful chapter in her life and returns to Kings Park State Hospital for the first time since her release. "The Story of the Hospital," during which Winer meets those whose lives intersected with Kings Park as they seek to make meaning out of their experience there. And, finally, "After the Hospital," tells the tragic story of deinstitutionalization in the 1980s and 1990s as state mental hospitals like Kings Park – including Philadelphia State Hospital at Byberry in 1990 – shut down and sent many patients, including some who had been housed for decades, back into society, often with little or no preparation and/or assistance.

The state of affairs in mental health care in America is deeply troubling. According to Harvard University's [National Comorbidity Survey Replication](#), a 2005 study of the state of mental health in America, 25 percent of Americans met the criteria for a mental illness within the previous year, and one-quarter of those with a mental illness had a serious mental disorder that interferes with their ability to function on a day-to-day basis. [The study found](#) that less than half

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What is public health - and why does it matter? Through prevention, education, and intervention, public health practitioners - including epidemiologists, health policy experts, municipal workers, and environmental health scientists - work to keep us healthy. But it's not always easy. Here at The Public's Health we'll show you why. Stories and commentary on a wide range of contemporary, historical, and ethical matters will address the challenges that lie ahead for public health in the 21st century.

Bloggers:

- Michael Yudell, an associate professor at Drexel University School of Public Health
- Jonathan Purtle, a doctoral student in public health who also works at Drexel's Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice

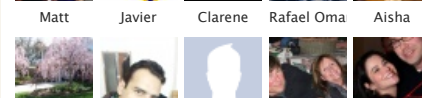
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of those in need receive treatment, and that the treatment received is often inadequate.

In 2009, the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), the nation's largest advocacy group "dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness," issued a report on the state of public mental health services across the nation. The report, which gave the U.S. mental health system a grade of "D," [calls attention to](#) budget cuts that are devastating public mental health services, and recommends increased public funding for mental illness, improved data collection, outcomes measurement, and accountability, the integration of mental and physical health care, the promotion of recovery and respect, and increased services for people with severe mental illness who are most at-risk.

In the coming months Winer will screen the film to some of the most important organizations in the mental health world: the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#), the [American Psychological Association](#), the [National Association of Social Workers](#), and the National Alliance on Mental Illness. By bringing the film to these mental health stakeholders, Winer hopes it can be a "stigma breaker," helping to generate discussion about our ongoing national failures concerning mental health, particularly for the poor and uninsured.

One of the ongoing challenges in mental health treatment in America is that "a large majority of the public still does not understand that we have replaced mental hospitals with prisons and jails," Winer told me. Her film shows alternative, community based treatments for the chronically mentally ill that Winer believes are "compassionate, supportive, and protective." Winer wants her audience to remember that "we don't have to rely on the criminal justice system for services and treatment."

As for a lasting message from her film, Winer believes that it "asks everyone who watches it to consider their own relationship to mental health. To me that is the most important thing the film offers."

Read more about [The Public's Health](#).

[Kings Park Trailer - August 2011](#) from [Kings Park Documentary](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Posted by Michael Yudell @ 12:57 PM [Permalink](#) | **File Under:** [Mental Illness](#) | | [Michael Yudell](#) | [Post a comment](#)

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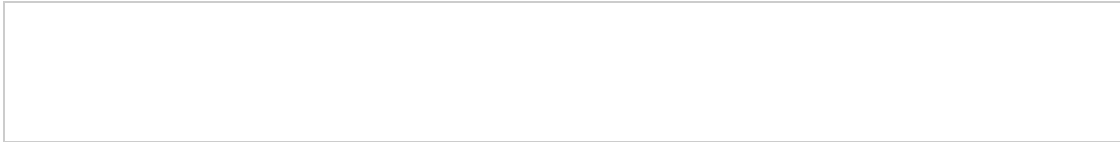
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