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LETTER

Life in a Mental Hospital

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To the Editor:

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Re "[Erasing the Past at the Ghost Hospital](#)," by Lawrence Downes (Sunday Observer, Aug. 5):

I was committed to Kings Park Psychiatric Center on Long Island as a teenager in the 1960s after a series of suicide attempts. Having experienced

the abuses of institutional life, I expected to rejoice at news of the hospital's bulldozing. Instead, I feel grief.

Little is being done to mark the passing of this chapter in the history of our health care system. I fear that if we fail to learn from the past, we will go on to repeat many of the same mistakes.

State hospitals were closed to save money. The promise was that savings would be invested in community mental health care. This never happened, and we are living with the fallout from this broken social contract.

Today, we rarely abandon people to life sentences in overcrowded hospitals without access to treatment. Instead, we rely on the penal system to shut people away.

I directed a documentary about Kings Park. In my travels with the film, people confide in me — usually in whispers — about their struggles. We're taught in our society to fear mental illness, so we continue to try to hide it. But as the past teaches, this effort doesn't work and costs us dearly.

LUCY WINER

New York, Aug. 7, 2012

The writer's documentary is "[Kings Park: Stories From an American Mental Institution](#)."

A version of this letter appeared in print on August 11, 2012, on page A18 of the New York edition with the headline: Life in a Mental Hospital.

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