

Voluntary Madness

Voluntary Madness: My Year Lost and Found In the Loony Bin

by Norah Vincent

Struggling with the psycho-emotional conflicts of being a woman living as a man for her last book, *Self-Made Man* (2006), Vincent checked herself into the psychiatric ward of a hospital. While there, she found inspiration for her next immersion-journalism experience. But this experience went way beyond observation as Vincent actually wondered about the state of her mental health. For a woman with a history of depression, what began as an investigation into psychiatric practices and questionable diagnoses, within the broader context of modern American culture, morphed into a personal exploration of mental stability. In this sometimes harrowing and sometimes humorous account, Vincent recalls her stay at three mental-health facilities: the ward of a big-city public hospital, a rural private psychiatric hospital, and an alternative-treatment program. Vincent chronicles not just the social and economic differences in illnesses and treatments at the facilities but also the madness of bureaucracies that overmedicate and don't listen enough to what patients have to say. A riveting and enlightening look at mental-health treatment.