



Welcome to My Country

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Lauren Slater, a brilliant writer who is a young therapist, takes us on a mesmerizing personal and professional journey in this remarkable memoir about her work with mental and emotional illness. The territory of the mind and of madness can seem a foreign, even frightening place—until you read *Welcome to My Country*.

Writing in a powerful and original voice, Lauren Slater closes the distance between "us" and "them," transporting us into the country of Lenny, Moxi, Oscar, and Marie. She lets us watch as she interacts with and strives to understand patients suffering from mental and emotional distress—the schizophrenic, the depressed, the suicidal. As the young psychologist responds to, reflects on, and re-creates her interactions with the inner realities of the dispossessed, she moves us to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human mind and spirit. And then, in a stunning final chapter, the psychologist confronts herself, when she is asked to treat a young woman, bulimic and suicidal, who is on the same ward where Slater herself was once such a patient.

Like *An Unquiet Mind*, *Listening to Prozac* and *Girl, Interrupted*, *Welcome to My Country* is a beautifully written, captivating, and revealing book, an unusual personal and professional memoir that brings us closer to understanding ourselves, one another, and the human condition.

Welcome to My Country Details

Date : Published July 14th 1997 by Anchor (first published January 30th 1996)

ISBN : 9780385487399

Author : Lauren Slater

Format : Paperback 199 pages

Genre : Psychology, Autobiography, Memoir, Nonfiction, Health, Mental Health, Mental Illness

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Ann says

Slater's accounts of many of the chronically mentally ill people she's treated--both on a locked ward for schizophrenics and in a clinic. What's unique about her writing is that she reflects on what she recognizes in herself during her process of treating patients. At one point in her life, she was diagnosed as a borderline personality. She has suffered from anorexia and attempted suicide. She talks about how her experiences with pain influence her engagement with patients. She's an interesting writer. I am going to look into her other books (including *_Prozac Diary_*). The final essay in this book, "The Three Spheres," about returning to the psych ward where she was treated as an adolescent to treat a patient. I had originally read this in a *_Best American Essays_* collection, and it's still strong here, but even more so because the rest of the essays in the book lead up to this one, and the characters reappear throughout.

Jennifer Pack says

i finished this book moments ago and am struggling with pinpointing my reaction. i am drawn to a book written by a psychologist with mental illness in her past. The surface scars of mental illness barely reveal the depth of the twisted pain endured. I am curious how to integrate one's personal experience with years of emotional and mental turmoil with a patient's experience. That is a question that lingers often in my mind.... Slater's book encompasses that question and she answered it in the core of this book...she asks what separates her from the ill patients she treats and answers "...The muscles to hold things in check - to channel and funnel- are stronger. I have not healed so much as learned to sit still and wait while pain does its dancing work, trying not to panic or twist in ways that make the blades tear deeper, finally infecting the wounds." I relate well to this idea as I go through my own journey.

There were parts that made mental illness almost poetic and I struggled with those parts, maybe because I am at a very raw point in my recovery. Perhaps the poetry emerges later when I can see this journey more in retrospect.

The other reason for reading this book was insight into patients and how to be an effective therapist. Therapy requires the ability to connect and I was impressed by Slater's creativity and intuition. If my path leads me to working with patients one day, I will certainly remember her insight and her openness. This review seems more a journal entry than critique, but I will leave it because these words encapsulate my immediate feelings. Perhaps as a day or more goes by, my reaction will change.

Ray Zimmerman says

An interesting account of mental illness and therapy. Her memoirs presented in this book describe six patients, with pseudonyms and possibly composite characters in some cases. According to the introduction, the anonymity of the patients is protected.

Three of the six chapters focus on men in a residential facility, all of them schizophrenic. A main figure is portrayed in each of these, while others get brief descriptions. Their struggles and hopes are sympathetically yet professionally portrayed. At least one seems beyond any hope at all. The other three chapters describe her work with outpatient clients. Like the strophe and anti-strophe of ancient hymns, these stories alternate

between group portraits and individual pictures. The last chapter presents her greatest challenge.

The book may be unique among professional memoirs in the level of transparency and disclosure involved. The stories are well written and the characters well portrayed. Welcome to My Country is a great read.

Steven says

Well-written memoir of work in a home for schizophrenics. The author's experiences with these troubled people are fascinating and her frank and vivid prose is refreshing. The book is an excellent source of information about various mental illnesses. Until recently my hometown never saw unkempt homeless men wandering the streets muttering to themselves. Having read Slater's book, I feel like I understand these men better and can find some sympathy for their struggles.

My favorite part of the book was Slater's discussion of the "Word Salad," and the challenges that the schizophrenics face when trying to communicate. They want to talk, but for some reason all they can find is a random mix of unrelated words and phrases. Some sit and write all day, filling notebooks with page after page of unrelated words. Slater would review some of these desperate efforts to connect and sometimes find a single sentence or two that she could understand. But if she took it back to the troubled writer, would they be able to discuss it?

I bought this book when I read about it in the "Journal of Creative Non-Fiction." Unlike the men she once counseled, Slater writes beautifully.

Mary says

Oh Lauren Slater! ((face palm)) What has she done with this book? I *loved* **Lying: A Metaphorical Memoir**. I adored it. Her writing was delicious and whimsical and daring and it was a swirling dream-like experience to read. And **Prozac Diary** was a fascinating and well written chronicle of the early years of anti-depressants.

What happened here?

She has the same beautiful prose and yet it annoyed me. Why?! Maybe she came across as condescending about her patients. Maybe she overly romanticized the schizophrenics she wrote about. Maybe she is just a little full of herself. Urgh!

Ash says

Welcome to my Country is a great book that effectively shows what it means to be diagnosed with a mental illness. It is nothing to be treated lightly. To do so would be insensitive. I was quite surprised on the author's use of descriptive language.

I am so used to doctors writing being so frank and succinct that Dr. Slater descriptions surprised me. The stories were all heartbreaking in their own right. I felt bad for the schizophrenic who was once a genius and,

could sometimes sense, what exactly he had lost and the depressed mother of two who is going have to endure a lifetime of perpetual depression just to have a few days of happiness.

Even Dr. Slater's own tragic past of abandonment and mental health illness was interesting as it showed an integral part of how she treats and empathizes with her own patients. How can one person overcome their mental roadblocks and others remain stuck on the other side?

Gregory Levine says

Couldn't put it down. Lauren Slater's prose is sensually, stunningly poetic. This book is charged with a joyful delight in foods and colors. At the same time, this is a tale of sadness and pain. Again, Lauren's words reveal the color and texture of terror, desperation, self-mutilation. But "Welcome to My Country" is much more than pretty words.

Dr. Lauren spins a web of self-revelation through her encounters with her psychology patients. It's spellbinding and endearing to watch her find, and reveal herself, in the most unlikely cases: the antisocial deviant, catatonic schizophrenic, and suicidal borderline personality disorder. In the end, her love for her patients is more astonishingly dazzling than her prose.

Simona says

A dispetto del titolo, Le stelle di Van Gogh non ha nessun nesso con il pittore olandese. Parla della follia e della pazzia spesso sintomi di creatività e di genio, come lo era appunto Van Gogh. Per certi aspetti, molto simile a L'uomo che scambiò sua moglie per un cappello di Oliver Sacks, anche questo libro di Lauren Slater è un viaggio nella medicina e nel rapporto che un dottore instaura con i propri pazienti.

Lauren Slater, da malata a terapeuta, instaura o prova a instaurare con i malati di mente, gli schizofrenici, un rapporto che sia il più umano possibile. Le stelle di Van Gogh è il suo percorso di psicoterapeuta a contatto con i pazienti. Le storie di Moxi, Marie e di molti altri ci fanno comprendere le loro patologie, ma allo stesso tempo la loro creatività, la loro follia e il loro genio.

Man mano che si addentra in queste storie, si scopre l'umanità, la bellezza dell'essere diversi e della follia in un rapporto intimo e accogliente che ci svela, ancora una volta, quando sia profonda la mente umana e le sue mille sfaccettature. Un altro modo per capire noi stessi, gli altri ed entrare ancora più in contatto con la nostra mente e anima.

Ryan Johnson says

Well, surprise surprise surprise, what an outstanding ending. I've always said to my Supervisee's, never cry at work. What I mean by that is never cry in front of your co-workers, Crying however in front of Pt.s is entirely different and can be very effective. Great Ending.

Jane says

I've read many of Slater's essays over the years; this is one of her earliest works. Though she has some thoughtful insights as a new psychologist working with a variety of patients, her prose veers from elegant and rich to overly florid and fanciful. Also, at times here, as elsewhere, her raw emotional tone leaves me feeling a bit uneasy. It's more than "oversharing;" it's a question of boundaries that seem too permeable.

Bob says

A young therapist, working with schizophrenic people, finds the standard, textbook methods do not achieve very much. So she tries something new: Find some way to reach the person inside. Not easy; most of her patients are lost in a world of vast confusion, and few -- if any -- of the people have connected with anyone for a very long time. If ever.

It was a difficult thing, but it worked, at least to a degree that made it worth doing. Connections with the patients were limited, at best, sort of like glimpsing the sky through massive clouds. But connections happened.

The patients seemed to welcome this. In the chaos of of severely dysfunctional mind, it must be incredibly lonely. Nearly everyone want contact with others, at least to some degree. But for many people, this is nearly impossible, through no fault of their own.

Lauren Slater also worked with others, people who were highly functioning but needed help with some of their issues. Something she discovered, from working with one of her patients:

There comes a moment when recovery is religious, when the person says, "All right. I will have faith. I will lay down my sword and shield and see what the world works in me."

In my own case, it has been difficult to quit hating the place I used to work, a fortune 500 company that is run by a bunch of thugs. Two years after I retired, I'm still trying to get over it. Lauren Slater's advice has helped me with this.

Chalice says

For those who are currently suffering from mental illness, and hope to heal and become a mental health professional, this book may inspire you.

Slater, a psychologist, used to suffer from mental illness. She implied through her story that we all have ghosts within us, even us therapists, and healing is a continual process. She was labelled as a patient that would continually be in and out of psychiatric treatment, but instead took her path of healing as a strength to help others who are deemed as hopeless to also find their way.

Unfortunately, Slater doesn't elaborate on her experiences of what actually happened to her. She simply makes references to them as she sits with her clients and their stories evoke strong feelings in her that remind her of her past. She brings to light that these ghosts may always be there, but that doesn't mean you can't achieve wellness, success, and help others.

Slater's poetic writing style was so intricate and beautiful, but her style didn't seem to match the content. She was writing about the darkness of mental illness-- to read it in such a poetic light felt strange. I would compare it to the feeling you may get in your stomach if you were sitting with someone who is telling you the details of their sexual abuse and laughing as if they were telling you a comedy, and seem to be unaware that you are finding their story horrifying. It just felt strange. Her details are alluring and truly suck you in, but for some people these details written in this style may be too much.

And after all that darkness I was expecting some sort of inspiration in the resolution of the book, but there was none. The resolution was simply that she too had experienced what many of her clients have gone through. Unfortunately I was hoping for more, because I think this is true for many therapists.

Alexia says

A bit of the flowery language could've been toned down just a tad. Other than that, I'm in love with this book. Her experience seeing people with schizophrenia grapple with larger existential questions mirrors what I see at the hospital I work at.

K says

This is a tough book for me to review.

I tend to be drawn to collections like these where psychologists recount stories of their work with various patients. I enjoyed Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy and Momma and the Meaning of Life: Tales of Psychotherapy, and was anticipating something along those lines. Welcome to My Country was similar in some ways, but not the same.

In this book Lauren Slater remembers her work with both low-functioning group home patients with schizophrenia and higher-functioning but still troubled outpatients with depression and other issues. Slater's language is poetic, beautiful at times but also a bit distracting and vague. Reading this book was reminiscent of Houses of Study: A Jewish Woman among Books, another memoir which teased me with the promise of a story I'd surely be compelled by but ended up substituting poetic language and metaphors for the details which would make that story come to life for me.

I appreciated Slater's respect and reverence for her patients, her efforts to meet them where they were, and her willingness to acknowledge frustrations and failures. Unfortunately, though, most of these stories left me feeling like I wanted more. More concrete details about how the patients moved from point A to point B to point C, what their obstacles were, their back-and-forth, etc. More clarity on Slater's internal process and how it informed her work with the patients. Yes, there was some, but not enough for my taste.

Here, though, is why I almost upped the rating to four stars. (view spoiler)

But that alone was not enough to negate my criticisms of the overall book, which still stand.

I do want there to be more books like this. If more therapists follow Lauren Slater's example, hopefully the range of quality will improve. Books like this can be a tremendous resource for therapists, and an area of human interest for everyone.

Elizabeth Gordon says

Quick read, very well written. The author writes in a very poetic way, which can be great at times and at other times was over the top.
