Clarion Review

Social Sciences

An Unprintable Book: Custom and Conflict in Norwegian Hospitals
Anne Rasmussen
Lulu
978-1-4452-2408-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

Anne Rasmussen is angry—at the Norwegian medical system, and at publishers who wouldn't print her book about it. The Norwegian Rasmussen titled her collection of brutally honest personal essays and articles *An Unprintable Book* to express her unapologetic frustration. With a degree in anthropology, she writes from the perspective of a "participant observer." Through this somewhat unique anthropological technique, she analyzes and dissects her medical experiences while making no excuses for her biases or negativity.

Rasmussen spent two months as a psychiatric patient suffering from "mania" in the early 1980s. She was also treated for breast cancer and endometriosis in the 1990s. Believing her hospital experiences to be fairly typical, she compassionately shares numerous conversations with and observations of other patients also struggling with the Norwegian medical bureaucracy. The clinical, rushed, and patronizing behavior she attributes to most of the doctors and nurses with whom she interacted is portrayed as counterproductive to recovery; she supports this assessment with credible documentation.

An Unprintable Book features eleven essays with titles such as, "The Story of a Hospital Doing It's Very Best to Treat My Genitalia" and "When Ill, Also Lonely." The latter is a moving piece on the difficulties the author encountered seeking support from family and friends in her ongoing medical drama and the emotional toll that took.

A harsh and somewhat shocking assessment of hospital treatment from her unrelenting perspective, "Encounters with the Hospital Devil," was published in *The Norwegian Medical Journal* in 1993. The final three essays deal with a conference she spoke at that brought patients and psychiatrists together for open discussion on improving their interactions, and the profound angst she experienced when her popular speech was eliminated from the video of the conference.

Rasmussen is an articulate writer with a passionate attachment to anthropology as a

medium for expressing her extraordinary grasp of patient dehumanization in all its cruel permutations. *An Unprintable Book* is fascinating. However, Rasmussen's strident leave-no-slight-unanalyzed style is a bit off-putting. At times the writing borders on an obsession with the extraordinary details of the author's life and defies the reality that she was not taken seriously by most professionals or laypeople.

Despite those points, one can't help but empathize through each ugly, painful, and enraging medical and personal encounter. Psychiatrists, doctors, and nurses, past, present, and future hospital patients, and anyone who's been challenged with mental health issues will find this an insightful and empowering read.

Patty Sutherland