



Chock Full of Nuts: My 28 Days Inside a Premier Psychiatric Hospital and the Shocking Truth

JaKob Williams

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Chock Full of Nuts is a vibrant and alarming memoir about surviving a flawed psychiatric care system.

JaKob Williams's harrowing memoir *Chock Full of Nuts* peeks into the conditions that patients endure at psychiatric hospitals.

Framed as a follow-up to *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, which it references on repeat, the book recounts Williams's experiences with inherited mental illness and time spent in a Massachusetts psychiatric hospital. Not much has changed in the intervening years, Williams suggests; the system has resisted change and modernization. Such claims are supported by his reflections on the twenty-eight days he spent at the hospital, which are covered in raw and unflinching terms.

For instance, the shock and disorientation of being roused by a fire alarm is recalled; so is the comfort of being outside on the manicured grounds. He also recalls being shuffled through more than sixty ineffectual classes, including classes for trauma and anger management that did not apply to his situation. Williams's life outside of the psychiatric hospital is also detailed for contrast, as with notes about how he became an artist, runner, and climber and endured a near-death experience on Mount Fuji.

Williams's fellow patients are well fleshed out, both in terms of their conditions and their lively interactions with him. Their positioning is somewhat representative at times, though: A collegiate champion wrestler, Ben, is used to illustrate the mental health issues that former athletes can face, for instance.

The book uses humor to temper its serious subject matter. For instance, Williams dubs the institution MrClean Hospital; elsewhere, he records an emergency tie purchase before a business meeting and jokes, in reference to a final meal, "[Don't] forget the whipped cream." Such moments complement the book's pointed observations and barbs: The hospital Williams stayed at, he says, was at first "nonwonkily" named Asylum for the Insane in 1811. Beyond such lightheartedness, the book indicts the system for being inhumane, flawed, and harming patients. Suggestions of overmedicating and notes about the use of electroconvulsive therapy complement its case for taking a more compassionate and individualized approach to psychiatric care. Indeed, the book's critiques of the institution are persuasive, and its accounts of the abuse that the patients were subjected to are eye-opening.

A powerful memoir, *Chock Full of Nuts* uses a troubled stay at a psychiatric hospital to indict the system, revealing what horrors patients are often subjected to without cause.

JOSEPH S. PETE (April 23, 2026)

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