

My soul is reborn in Hong Kong: reflections on a mental health episode

Last Modified on 07/19/2019 9:25 am EDT



For some, this could be a hard article to write. I'll admit that I drafted it while I was sectioned in a psychiatric hospital. At the time, it was against my will, but if my present self had a choice, then I wouldn't have it any other way.

When I was in Hong Kong recently on holiday, I had what was called a "nervous breakdown". I never saw it coming. The medical team said I could be "manic depressive". The first problem was my ranting and raving towards my family, insulting them and doing all sorts of things that were out of character. I ran out into a rainstorm, for example, wearing just a cotton dress. I had a panic attack on a tram. I was disoriented and didn't know where I was. I asked for a cigarette, when I haven't smoked in years. I do vaguely remember some of these events, but through a distorted lens.



Aberdeen Square in Hong Kong

So my dear mother and sister took me to the Emergency Services. I decided to write this because the care I received from the Hong Kong government was impeccable. They had to eliminate all external causes like drug-taking before they could treat me properly. Let me paint a picture that I was a paranoid wreck who wouldn't eat or let anyone touch me. I would punch and shout and spit, I so badly believed people were trying to control me or kill me. I'm told all this in retrospect by my mother, who luckily I at least would listen to. Doctors were shocked when she told them I had a job as a freelance writer and a boyfriend in England. I think they probably thought I was some vagrant or drug addict, or both.

So I had to be sedated and they discovered an infection from some supplements I had been taking. They had to inject into my spine. In the first ward I would apparently wake up screaming and thrashing, then go back to sleep. Luckily it was a geriatric ward, so no one's sleep was disturbed. I have no recollection of any of this.

Finally, in my last ward, the staff couldn't have been kinder towards me. It's "care" in the true sense of the word. Again, when I came in I was effing and blinding; I was restrained to my bed for most of the first four or five days while they waited for the heavy drugs they gave me to kick in. My mother dealt with everyone in Cantonese in which she is fluent, and I am not. And one of the craziest fucking parts is that when I was lucid, I was universally praised for the abysmally basic Cantonese that I can speak.



As the drugs took effect and I returned to my normal self, nurses and patients began to talk to me. Apparently I had frightened them so much that one of them prayed for me. And I recovered almost totally in five days from total psychosis. I was strapped to the bed for my own safety, including my arms and legs. People were curious about where I was from and exceptionally polite. I didn't even mind being showered by the nurses and given an enema because they have such professionalism. I mean the enema was still completely disgusting and also came out both ends.

The hospital was understaffed just like any other medical facility. We weren't allowed pens because they were classed as a dangerous object, but we were allowed ink nibs embedded in corks. So I read a lot, and wrote with my cork pen which I was allowed to use between 8.30am and 8.30pm. It was a bit like a cross between a boarding school and a prison. After I was discharged I learned that they had waived some of the initial fees to treat me because I had been sectioned, and I think the whole thing ended up costing somewhere around £2,000. This was to get me restabilised and recover from a complete psychosis.



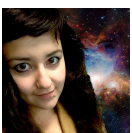
Fountain at Aberdeen Square in Hong Kong

So I shall be staying on the medication for now. I'm on Risperidone and Lorazepam. I can't believe the incredible help I received from total strangers and I feel truly blessed to be from two countries. I have absolutely no shame about being a mental health tourist to Hong Kong.

I'm telling this story not to boast or be sensationalist, but to share an experience I had that profoundly affected me. The whole thing kind of confirmed what I already suspected: that we live in a sick society, and that in some ways mentally ill people are the most sane of us all. I'm intending to get therapy to help me with some of the thinking patterns that led me into a cycle of overwork and eventual psychosis. I hope that if anyone who reads this is struggling, they think about getting help as quickly as possible. It was only through the kindness and help of very many people that I ended up with such a positive outcome.

Published: 18 July 2019

Photo by [Ravi Roshan on Unsplash](#)



By Catherine Heath. *I'm the community builder for KnowledgeOwl. I'm a writer, artist, and all-round creative person. [Find out how we could work together!](#)*