

Midnight on the Psych Ward

Category: Nursing

written by Susan Cunningham | January 4, 2026

In June 2013, my life was upended by a psychotic break after several months of chaotic and progressively disabling thoughts and behaviors. Then, on Father's Day in the early morning, I became acutely manic, convinced I was going to solve the problem of the exorbitant cost of undergraduate education. Instead of sleeping, I wrote frantically in a notebook, filling the pages with my thoughts and plans for saving humanity. Meanwhile, I also became convinced that my upcoming presentation for my Master's in Health Professions Education should be the first and in fact only presentation at that day's Convocation Seminar. At 3 a.m., I called my eighty-year-old parents and insisted that they come right away—a one-hour-plus drive—to watch my extraordinary presentation.

My euphoria and grandiosity were boundless. Eventually I was taken away—unwillingly—by ambulance and admitted to the locked psych ward.

My first night in the psyche ward, during my nurse's midnight check, she found me crying in my hospital bed. Quietly and soothingly, she shushed me, brought a warm blanket and stayed with me until I fell back to sleep.

Never in my life had I felt so deeply cared for by someone outside my own family. I will never forget it. Her care that night began my journey back to living my happy and healthy life. I was diagnosed with Bipolar 1 disorder, and I have been stable ever since. I am forever grateful for my nurse's kind presence at the start of my journey, and I only wish she could know how much she contributed to my story of hope and healing.

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