



Ten Days in a Mad-House

Nellie Bly

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This is the true story of reporter Nellie Bly, who pretends to be insane, and manages to get herself committed into an insane asylum in the USA. This revised second digital edition is a fascinating account, specially formatted for today's e-readers by Andrews UK.

Ten Days in a Mad-House Details

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Author : Nellie Bly

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From Reader Review Ten Days in a Mad-House for online ebook

Alex ? Deranged KittyCat ? says

Ten Days in a Mad-House is one amazing book! I love it. The fact that it's a real story makes it even more interesting.

Nellie Bly is a journalist who is asked to go undercover as a patient in an asylum and write about it. She does and it's amazing how easily she is declared insane. The examination mainly consists in a brief physical checkup (what's that all about looking at the tongue?) and a few questions focused on whether or not she is a kept woman.

She is finally shipped to the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island, at which point she decides to start behaving normal again (without letting her true identity be known). Still she is labeled delusional and treated as such. There's an almost funny situation in which the doctor asks Nellie if she hears voices during the night. She replies truthfully that she does (the nurses were always extremely noisy).

During Bly's stay at the asylum, the doctors are ignorant and the nurses are abusive. They mock, beat and even strangle the patients. And they threaten worse if anybody complains to the doctors. Not to mention the ice-cold baths. They are administered regardless of the patient's health status. Got a fever? Here's a cold bath! Pneumonia? Even better! It's just horrible and I'm thankful for the time period I live in with its scientific progress.

And those poor women. Not all of them were mad. There were women brought in by their husbands, fathers or friends. Some of them didn't even know where they were being taken to until it was too late.

Ten Days in a Mad-House is a short, incisive book (Bly tries to keep as objective as possible) and you can read it [here](#).

Alex says

Nellie Bly was the world's first stunt journalist. She traveled around the world in 72 days to beat Phineas Fogg, she documented the conditions of women factory workers, and she faked insanity to get committed to the notorious Blackwell Island. This is her exposé of the conditions there.

You too can practice insanity at home!

It's a great read: brisk, engaging, convincing. She describes with authority and empathy the freezing, starving, beating, choking and waterboarding of the poor women interred there, some of whom are actually crazy and some rapidly being driven so; it's easy to see why reform came immediately after the piece's publication. She also can't resist giggling a little over a handsome doctor she meets there, which is weird but charming.

It's about a hundred pages and it reads quickly. Here's the full text, complete with illustrations. There are also good cheap Kindle versions around.

Melanti says

An interesting, but tragic read. Not much of the portrayal of the madhouse was new to me since it's more or less how asylums of that era are portrayed in fiction. But it's still good to know that the fictional portrayals are based in fact. I can only imagine how sensational this article must have been when it was first put out.

Regarding the audio - I wasn't a huge fan of the voices the narrator makes. Never thought I'd have to complain about a woman narrating a woman's voice in a falsetto-ish tone. You get what you pay for, I guess.

Dee Arr says

There are a number of publishers offering this book and, of the few I have seen, I found this publication to be more enjoyable.

In any of the publications, readers will find the main story of how journalist Elizabeth Cochran Seaman (pen name Nellie Bly) posed as an insane person in order to gain entry into Bellevue hospital on Blackwell's Island. This is a revealing look not only into how people were institutionalized 130 years ago, but also the lack of knowledge of medical doctors at that time. The book also includes two short articles on employment agencies and women working in paper box factories.

I found this publication more enjoyable for a number of reasons. There are hand drawn illustrations throughout the book depicting Ms. Seaman at various stages of her investigations. The back of the book features pictures of Ms. Seaman and a list of words that might not be well-known to modern readers. The Annotations section in the back offers an overview of Blackwell's Island Lunatic Asylum as well as notes on Ms. Seaman's participation. Her other books are also listed. If this book interests you, I would recommend this publisher (Amazon - in Kindle or paperback) over the others I have seen.

Excellent book for those interested in history or just curious about this slice of life in New York over a century ago. Four stars.

Chandra Claypool (wherethereadergrows) says

A couple of years ago I did a haunted walking tour in my neighborhood and the person in charge talked about this story. I was immediately intrigued and when I got home, got online and ordered the book. It proceeded to sit on my shelves and was forgotten for quite some time. Then late last year, I read *The Address* by Fiona Barton and lo and behold, Nellie Bly was mentioned and remembered I had this story to read... and finally I did!

Nellie Bly went undercover in an insane asylum.... with no real knowledge of how she may get back out. All to try and expose the horrible treatment of the women inside. By this point, we've all seen how patients have been treated in movies and wonder if it's done that savagely as a means of "entertainment" in such series as *American Horror Story* or movies about the insane. Sadly to say, it appears to only be a reflection of things

that really happened back in the 1800s.

Women were beaten, choked, given bread so stale and moldy that sometimes they would find spiders living inside them... ugh. The abuse of power and the fact that Nellie so easily was committed to Bellevue and then shipped to Blackwell's Island for the Insane is astonishing. At a mere 96 pages, this is one that will get to you. Fortunately, as a result of her visit and the exposure (though some well hidden and hard for her to prove), the City of New York appropriated \$1,000,000 per annum than ever for the care of the insane. Ten days well spent in the mad-house for this to have occurred and I'm sure the patients thank her.

I only drop this from a 5 star review to a 4 because I'm picky and noticed quite a few errors in this print that sometimes caused a little bit of confusion in my read.

Kate (GirlReading) says

This was fascinating. My heart broke a little every time I reminded myself that it, terrifyingly, wasn't a work of fiction.

Dem says

3.5 Stars

Ten Days in a Mad-House is a book by newspaper reporter Nellie Bly. Nellie took the terrifying task of posing as Nellie Borwn in an undercover assisment to investigate the deplorable conditions of insane asylums. While on the assignment she feigned insanity at a women's boarding house and was involuntarily committed to the Women's Lunatic Alylum on Blackwell's Island.

Ten Days in a Mad House is a quick and insightful read into the way the mentally ill were treated or should I say mistreated in many cases during the latter part of the 19th century. What shocked me the most about this story was how quickly the doctors pronounced Nellie insane and how many sick and sane people ended up in Asylums for completely the wrong reasons. This account is told in a matter of fact style and is not dramatic in the telling but I suppose this is reflected in the fact that it was originally written as newpaper articles.

It was so upsetting to read the suffering of patients and while accounts of beatings and cruelty was difficult to read I found the patients suffering of cold and hunger and sanitary needs just heartbreaking as these people were what could only be described as tortured mentally and physically by the state and many of the employees of these institutions.

The public response to her writings was enormous and as a result and investigation was set up and a vast sum invested to improve conditions in the Asylums which was a great achievement for Nellie Bly and her time spent undercover did so much highlight the conditions of patients in Asylums.

Wealhtheow says

Nellie Bly was a reporter in New York who convinced the courts that she was insane and got herself locked away at Blackwell's Island. Her exposé of the conditions there led to increased care and resources given to the patients. What really shocked me about this piece was not the terrible treatment the patients endured, but how easily, and on what tenuous grounds, women were declared insane.

Sara M. Abudahab says

A non-fiction story by Nellie Bly (or as she called herself in the book Nellie Brown) who was a reporter in the late 1880s that faked insanity in order to get committed to an insanity asylum in Blackwell Island or as currently called Roosevelt Island in New York City.

Roosevelt Island is a very small island which was used mainly for hospitals they would send patients and the insane there to isolate them from the rest of the city.

"And then, once in, what would be my experience? And after? How to get out? Bah! I said, they will get me out."

There's really no words to describe this, her bravery to do such an experiment in the 1880s! And the fact that she might have been stuck in there is beyond terrifying.

For some reason this reminded me of the Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath, maybe because the mentally distrusted people in both books were treated horribly.

"I talked and acted just as I do in ordinary life.

Yet strange to say, the more sanely I talked and acted the crazier I was thought to be..."

What did I hate about this?

The NURSES! Oh God they're monsters

The physical examination and diagnosis?! It's just completely sad that the doctor who examined her was actually flirting with the nurse while doing so, he decided that she was insane and to be put in the asylum and to be given drugs, (I'm really curious of what kind of drugs she was prescribed if she wasn't even properly diagnosed?!)

"He gave the nurse more attention than he did me, and asked her six questions to every one of me. Then he wrote my fate in the book before him."

"take a dose of some mixture out of a glass to make me sleep, they said that if I did not take it he would put it into my arm with a needle."

all in all it was a really good book.

Valerity (Val) says

For its time, its quite a story and the reporter took quite a little risk when she got herself tossed into an asylum back in those days, depending on acquaintances to get her back out when the time came. I'm not sure I'd be quite so trusting, under those circumstances. She found quite a story behind the walls, and what she wrote made quite a stir when she got out.

11811 (Eleven) says

This was excellent. A journalist fakes insanity in order to gain admittance to an insane asylum in 1887. She sees some bad shit. She reports it. A number of reforms are introduced as a result of the bad shit she reports. I can't believe I hadn't heard of this until now.

I listened to the audiobook which was only a couple hours long and the narration was outstanding. Highly recommended.

I was provided this audiobook at no charge by the author, publisher and/or narrator in exchange for an unbiased review via AudiobookBlast.com Thanks for the book!

Shirley (stampartiste) says

What a brave and daring job of investigative reporting Nellie Bly (pen name of Elizabeth Jane Cochran) undertook in 1887 to investigate reports of brutality and neglect at the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island in New York City! To think this type of medical "science" was going on in the middle of one of the world's largest cities in an age of supposed "enlightenment". The sad truth is that the treatment of disturbed individuals didn't really improve for almost another century. But thanks to Nellie Bly, the horrific "diagnosis" and "treatment" of the unfortunate women who found themselves confined to this facility were exposed by Bly's infiltration there. Bly was truly a courageous woman who was not afraid of breaking barriers.

VictoriaNickers says

Ten Days in a Mad-house, hat's off to you, Nellie Bly. My new hero.

For the sake of a story, she faked insanity and she got herself admitted into an insane asylum then wrote an exposé on the Blackwell's Island women's asylum in New York. Not knowing how, or if, she or anybody else would be able to get her out. And all this before women even had the right to vote. Blows my mind. Girls got guts.

The story was published in a series of articles for Joseph Pulitzer's New York City Newspaper The World in the late 1800s (Yes, dude who the Pulitzer Prize is named after) and then later in novel form. I can't help but

think about what an exciting time it must have been to read newspapers in New York. This must have been the golden age of journalism. Really, it's investigative journalism at it's best. Nellie Bly could teach a thing or two to all those reporters who now write crappy commentary reports on the latest episodes of the Kardashian's. Well written journalism like this is a hard thing to come by these days. Or maybe I'm just reading the wrong websites, I dunno?!?

The story is compelling, eye opening and horrifying all at the same time. The abuse of power and the conditions that these women suffered makes me think about how people who can do little for themselves are treated by others in society. What does that say for humanity? Has anything changed in the 21st century? It's a very thought provoking read. It's a must read.

Wow, I'm still amazed by the story. It will be one that haunts me for a long time.

She also wrote Around the World in Seventy-Two Days, also for The World, which was inspired by Jules Verne Around the World in Eighty Days. I have never read Jules Verne in my life but I am definitely going to pick it up and then read Nellie Bly's account of her attempt to match it.

Amanda says

This was amazing and horrifying. In 1887 Nellie Bly faked insanity and spent 10 days in an insane asylum so she could report on the conditions. The conditions were horrendous at best. There were beatings, cold baths in the same water as all the other "prisoners", inedible food, extreme cold conditions and the list goes on and on. Due to her bravery and reporting skills she was able to improve conditions and get more money allocated to treatment of the insane then ever had before.

Linda Strong says

Ten Days in A Mad-House, Was Written By Nellie Bly in 1887, after she lived, undercover, at a women's insane asylum at Blackwell's Island in 1887 for ten days. This was an assignment given to her by Joseph Pulitzer.

It is so hard to read this account in 2017 ... 130 years after Nellie Bly's report of her 10 days undercover playing the part of an insane woman. At that time there were 1600 women imprisoned.. some of them for nothing more than not being able to speak English, some were there at the behest of their husbands who had tired of them. Whatever the reasons, these women suffered on a daily basis.

There was inadequate clothing ... some women actually died of hypothermia inside the asylum. They were given cold water baths once a week ... 62 women in Nellie's quarters shared the bath water. They were given very little in the way of clothing ... no blankets, no pillows, no shawls.

The food was horrible. Cold tea (?) in the morning... piece of bread covered with a butter so rank it couldn't be eaten. Soup for lunch (cold) was served in the morning's tea cups. Meat was usually next to raw, some had worms, the inmates had no forks or knives and thus ate with their fingers if they ate at all.

Nurses and/or caregivers were mean, cruel, some seemed to border on insanity themselves. The patients were

tortured in some ways ... some were choked until they were unconscious, locked in closets.

This book is the accounting of the things Nellie Bly saw and heard ... and which led to a court hearing in which she testified.

I can only say how much I appreciate her efforts to ease the lives of these poor women and those that followed.

Petra X says

Update The book is free here.

If you read this book without knowing anything of Nellie Bly except that she was a journalist, you might think it was a wonderful exposé of the absolute horrors of bedlam in New York.

You might doubt whether really the food was so bad that apart from a crust or two and a bowl of cold tea, it was totally inedible - the bread had spiders baked into it. You might wonder if the nurses were all nasty, brutish and extremely violent. Question if the doctors were either having public affairs with their illiterate nursing assistants or just plain blind to the extreme violence, starvation and freezing conditions all around. You might even come to the conclusion, as I did that even if half (or perhaps a quarter) of all this was true then it was outrageous and perhaps fantastical. But it was a good bit of reporting, because she was taken seriously and conditions did change for the better, or were said to, which is the same thing in a book.

However, if you knew that Nellie Bly (the pseudonym of Elizabeth Cochran) was an investigative journalist with all that implies in the modern era, and had also written, "Nellie Bly as a White Slave" and "Trying to be a Servant" you might think she was a bit of a sensationalist reporter who'd do anything for a laugh and a buck and you wouldn't be far wrong. (These two pieces are available at the link above here Also some strange advertisements).

It was then my opinion of the book sunk down to a 3 star. Just a journalist assignment, pays the bills, keeps her in the public eye as a late 19thC 'celebrity'. Just as she went off on a less-than-eighty-days jaunt around the world for a newspaper.

But then, it all changed when I read that these sensationalist titles were to gain the popular eye - Nellie Bly was a fierce feminist and exposé of the terrible attitudes and sometimes treatment women faced from the completely male-driven society of her time. Nellie Bly's schtick extended to exposing prison conditions (which she also got improved somewhat), corruption in the State Legislature (you think anyone could affect political corruption more than temporarily?) So sensationalism was a means to an end. How could I give less than 5 stars to a woman who stood together with Emma Goldman and Susan B. Anthony. She should be better known now and an icon of her times and profession.

Christy B says

I do not know where to even start with this. The fact that this was non fiction just blew my mind. I've read

fiction books that take place in mad houses during the 19th century, but the fiction was more of a reality than I had originally thought.

Nellie Bly is a journalist and gets an assignment in 1887 to go undercover and spend ten days in a mad-house and report her findings. She goes about this by purchasing a room in a women's boarding house and acting peculiar. She says that all the other women are crazy; she sits up all night; she keeps asking where her trunks are. None of this is even remotely crazy behavior, but the other boarders become agitated and the police are called in. Just goes to show how quickly a label was placed on somebody. Eventually, she is declared mad and sent off to the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island.

When Nellie is in the mad house, she discovers that absolutely nothing is being done to help anyone, and just how quickly women were admitted. Some women were just getting over physical illnesses, some women couldn't even speak English! Nellie acts perfectly sane once she arrives, but no matter what she says, it's blown over as 'ravings.' Some women actually ask the doctors to test them to see if they are insane or not, but they are ignored. And the doctors do absolutely nothing. They do not even *listen* to the women. *Everything* they say is written off as ravings of a mad woman.

The women were fed food that wasn't even fit for animal consumption. There was absolutely no heat, so the women practically froze to death. The women were given baths in cold water that wasn't even changed until the water got thick. ICK. The nurses used physical violence, along with agitating some of the women to act mad in front of the doctors. Some women were afraid to report this to the doctors, but it was no use if they did, because the doctors didn't listen, anyhow. There were no activities to stimulate the minds of the patients, so, if anything, these so-call "hospitals" actually made most of the patients - who weren't even mad to begin with - actually mad.

When Bly left, her reports launched a jury investigation, and surprise surprise! Things started to improve.

This book was riveting. It made me angry; it disgusted me. Nellie Bly was truly an amazing woman. I suggest reading more about her.

Sara says

First of all, I tried to imagine what kind of courage it took for Nellie Bly to allow herself to be committed to this kind of horrible institution from which there were no avenues of escape. I would have been too frightened of the possibility of being left there indefinitely to accept this assignment!

The writing is very straight forward and the experiences are detailed in a way that makes it ring with truth. It seems that the most cruel of people were employed in insane asylums at this time and that anyone who was sane going in would be quite insane coming out.

My father's best friend was committed against his will to a state insane asylum in the early 1960s. He went in a jovial, quite man with a drinking problem, he came out a broken man, sad and depressed. He told my father that no one would ever know what he had endured at the hands of his "keepers". He killed himself several months after his release, leaving a note that said he could not sleep for fear of being recommitted and would rather be dead. My father was inconsolable and never forgave his friend's wife for having put him there in the first place.

Those kinds of institutions are closed now and I'm sure people who go into care facilities get serious attempts at help. My concern now is that there is very little help available for people with chronic mental health issues and no money to get the help they need. At least no one can commit you without a hearing and the legal system has been vastly improved since the time when Nellie Bly could be so easily committed to an Island without any limit on the time she could be held or the treatments she could receive.

Beverly says

This is an extraordinary account. Nellie Bly was a force to be reckoned with as a reporter and as a person. She allowed herself to be institutionalized in a notorious insane asylum in New York to do an investigation on how the mentally ill women were treated there. Her article of that experience was written in 1887. She also did reports on Employment Agencies for women and the treatment of female factory workers in New York. Two of these articles were included at the end of *Ten Days in a Madhouse*. If she wasn't a good writer, these reports would still be of interest because of the snapshot of a time when women were entering the work force and about public mental health facilities. I heard about this story from another book I read and avoided it at first, since I thought it would be a torturous read in an 1880s vernacular, but it was well written and matter of fact. The only drawback to the report was that while she said the city decided to give more money to the asylum, I would have liked to know how the money was spent and if life did improve for the poor souls.

Loretta says

This was a very disturbing read for me. Mental health is an illness and this book showed how horribly patients were being treated at the Women's Lunatic Asylum in 1887. It brought back the horrible images of how, in the 70's, Geraldo Rivera blew the whistle on Willowbrook State School in Staten Island where the same horrific treatment of patients was happening.

This small book is not for the faint of heart.
