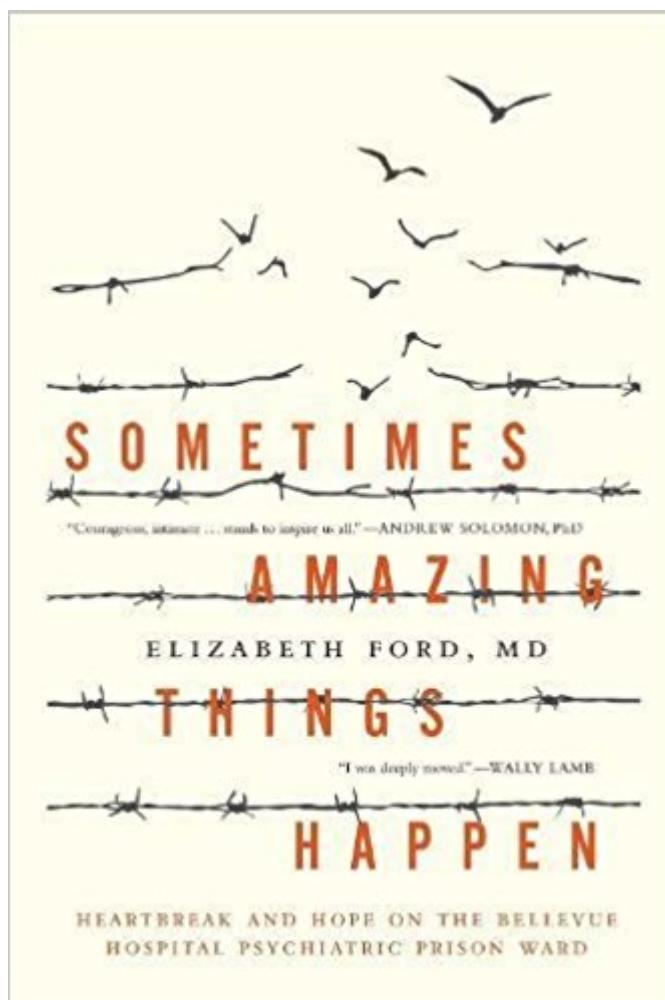


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# Sometimes Amazing Things Happen: Heartbreak And Hope On The Bellevue Hospital Psychiatric Prison Ward



## Synopsis

From the Chief of Psychiatry for Correctional Health Services in New York City comes a revelatory and deeply compassionate memoir that takes readers inside Bellevue Hospital's forensic psychiatry unit and brings to life the world—the system, the staff, and the haunting cases—that shaped one young psychiatrist as she learned about respect, survival and our shared humanity. Elizabeth Ford went through medical school unsure of where she belonged. It wasn't until she did her psychiatry rotation that she found her calling—to care for one of the most vulnerable populations of mentally ill people, the inmates of New York City's jails, including Rikers Island, who are so sick that they are sent to the Bellevue Hospital Prison Ward for care. These men were broken, without resources or support, and very ill. They could be violent, unpredictable, but they could also be funny and tender and needy. Mostly, they were human and they awakened in Ford a boundless empathy. Her patients made her a great doctor and a better person. While Ford was a psychiatrist at Bellevue she became a wife and a mother. In her book she shares her struggles to balance her personal and professional lives, to care for her children and her patients, and to maintain the empathy that is essential to her practice—all in the face of a complex institution, an exhausting workload, and the deeply emotionally taxing nature of her work. Ford brings humor, grace, and humanity to the lives of the patients in her care and in beautifully rendered prose illuminates the inner workings (and failings) of our mental health and criminal justice systems.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In this courageous, intimate account of the troubled intersection between criminality and mental illness, Elizabeth Ford writes with compassion and insight about the most neglected and feared members of our society. " •Andrew Solomon, Ph.D., Professor of Clinical Psychology, Columbia University and author of " Far From the Tree" and " Far and Away" "A wise man once advised me that, while unrealistic expectations can sucker-punch us, hope never will. Dr. Ford's exploration of life on a prison ward for the mentally ill pulls no punches, but like the good doctor herself, her story locates hope and compassion in the midst of institutionalized despair. " Sometimes Amazing Things Happen" possesses the power to open eyes, change attitudes, and affirm the worth of society's most afflicted and forgotten individuals. I was deeply moved." •Wally Lamb, author of She's Come Undone and I Know This Much Is True" . . . " a rare insider's view of what happens in a mental hospital and on a psychiatric prison ward . . . " a must read . . ." •Benjamin Sadock M.D., Menas S. Gregory Professor of Psychiatry, NYU School of Medicine" If you have ever been a correctional psychiatrist, no account before Elizabeth Ford's " Sometimes Amazing Things Happen" quite adequately conveys the vexing challenge of caring for these immensely complex patients at the cross roads of psychiatry and the criminal justice system. These patients are tragic exemplars of the worst mishaps of childhood adversity, human cruelty, and neurodevelopment run amuck. The simplistic notion that psychiatric patients in jails and prisons are merely displaced occupants of shuttered state mental hospitals is thoroughly dispelled by Ford's extraordinary account of caretaking for these deeply disturbed men who do bad things. " She reveals their human complexity, sadness and impulsive rage, " poignantly revealing the struggle of a physician to try to heal enough of what ails them in order to offer a chance at freedom. This is " an illuminating account of the lives she encounters, her challenge to humanize the jail hospital environment, but moreover " an unadorned exploration of how a doctor maintains hope and perseveres in the face of overwhelming human and institutional dysfunction. " •Marvin Swartz M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Duke University School of Medicine" A rare glimpse into the inner world of a psychiatrist, whose empathy and boundless passion cannot be easily contained . . . A poignant and powerful tribute to the human relationships that exist between doctor and patient and to a healing process that is often not unidirectional. " •Scott Soloway, M.D., Director of Manhattan Assisted Outpatient Treatment, NYU School of Medicine" Amazing things can happen if you open your heart and mind to the idea that, even in the most challenging circumstances, dignity and humanity can be discovered,

preserved and nurtured to help heal social wounds . . . As the tales unfold, readers are carried away on the amazing journey displaying the resilience of the human spirit and the chance for healing and hope."  Debra A. Pinals, M.D., A Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Program in Psychiatry, Law, and Ethics, University of Michigan

Elizabeth Ford, MD is currently the Chief of Psychiatry for Correctional Health Services for New York City's Health and Hospitals and a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine. She was formerly the Director of Forensic Psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital, specializing in the treatment of individuals with serious mental illness in the criminal justice system, and the Director of the NYU Forensic Psychiatry Fellowship Training Program. Dr. Ford is the author of multiple peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters, as well as the editor of *Landmark Cases in Forensic Psychiatry*, a book about seminal U.S. Supreme Court cases related to psychiatry. She is a recognized national expert in issues related to incarceration and mental illness and teaches extensively about these topics. She lives in New York with her family.

This is a book worth reading whether you have close personal experience with the world of mental illness or are looking for insight into a grim reality that most Americans try to pretend doesn't exist. Highlighting the humanity of both her patients and co-workers, Dr. Ford's journal-like memoir conveys some of the best and worst of working in what has to be one of the most challenging careers possible. While it's not the gritty expose I was expecting, *Sometimes Amazing Things Happen* tackles some of the harsh realities of working at or being a patient in our nation's severely dysfunctional criminal justice/mental health system. It's clear that the book could have been devoted solely to documenting the injustice and abuse present in the system but Dr. Ford instead emphasizes the element of hope in herself and others. The book doesn't offer any grand solutions on how to make things better but carries the simple message that actually caring about these patients is crucial and our lives are enriched when we do so.

I read this whole book waiting for amazing things to happen. This woman, Elizabeth Ford, has a passion for working in what I would consider to be a very difficult place with sometimes extremely difficult people. Positive results are often short-lived, and almost all of these people never will lead normal lives. I cried when I finished the book and then saw the picture of Elizabeth. Her eyes are full of compassion. So beautiful!!

I work in the mental health field and I found this book very relatable. Elizabeth gives excellent insight into this career choice both as a doctor and other support personnel. If you wondered what it would be like to work in a mental health facility, this book will give you a good taste. I can tell you that when you have a good day and really get to help someone, its incredible, but bad days are like none you've ever had in any other job. I have learned so much about the suffering of people with mental illness and the everyday challenges they must ensure. I connected with the author in every phase of her career. This book is an interesting, quick read and will have special meaning to those who work in mental health facilities.

There is nothing much "amazing" here. I expected more information about the patients but this is mostly an in-depth psychological catharsis for the author. I know about the doctors life - her kids - her personal issues - but I don't know much about how the patients came to the hospital or if they really had the opportunity to get better.

This is a thoughtful, honest, and courageously written book about how a young psychiatrist learned to navigate and grow in the most famous psychiatric hospital in the United States, Bellevue. Dr. Ford brings stories of some of her patients to life in such a way that allows the reader to know the patient without sensationalizing him. While Dr. Ford could have dealt only with her patient's histories, crimes, and resulting diagnoses, she chose instead to weave also into this compelling book the effect that her work had on her development as a doctor and a person. She is not shy in describing the personal strain and scary moments the work had on her nor in minimizing the stress and trauma such an environment can engender. Dr. Ford is a doctor who clearly knows her responsibility to her patients. While she cannot change their history or reduce their sentences she learns she can relate to them on a purely human level. Dr. Ford does not attempt to provide answers or solutions to a very difficult and controversial issue but she does open the opportunity for discussion on a sensitive and uncomfortable matter that some try to pretend does not exist. It is timely and well worth the read.

I love this book and I love Dr. Ford. I volunteer as a restorative circle facilitator in a high poverty and high discipline problem elementary school. I see many similarities between the patients and their environment and the environment the kids at the school are in. I fell in love with Dr Ford in the introduction when she states: "I have come to see my success as a doctor not by how well I treat

mental illness but by how well I respect and honor my patients." This is similar to the approach I take when working with kids. I love how in chapter 8 Dr. Ford empathizes with a dangerous man who has armed himself with poop. She writes: "If I were in his situation, I might do the same." Her compassion is amazing as she writes of the despair she feels when faced with her powerlessness to help and protect him from the violence and evil that infests his world. I love how in chapter 9, she shows how consistent caring leads to a 3 year breakthrough with a patient no one wants to deal with. I am only on Chapter 10 and can't wait to read more. I never write a review, but have been so moved by what I have read so far that I had to tell the world about just how great this book is. Dr Ford reminds us that everyone - no matter how damaged by violence or mental illness they are - is still a human being with good at their core and that core can be accessed through lovingkindness.

If you are interested in mental illness this book gives you such a real life look into these medical professionals and patients lives. I couldn't put it down book is great!

This book gives a rare look at a world unknown to most people: men with severe mental illness who are also incarcerated. It is important to see their humanity, and to find room for hope. It is also important to witness the extreme undeserved suffering we inflict on those we send to prison.

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