

opinion

Introducing...

**John O'Donoghue author of
Sectioned: A life interrupted
– Mind Book of the Year 2010**

It was a great honour to see my memoir awarded Mind Book of the Year. To be in the same company as writers like Hilary Mantel, Studs Terkel, Jenny Diski – well, writers live on dreams and here was my dream come true.

I'd been writing seriously since I was 14. This was when my father died and I composed poems that tried to remember him, to mourn him, to come to terms with what I'd lost. Soon after my father's death my mother became unwell, and I was fostered. Then I was sectioned aged 16, and my mother died three years later. I became a revolving door client, in and out of hospital, writing all the while, and was also in a therapeutic community, a large homeless hostel for men, on the streets, in squats, and in Pentonville when I was unwell.

As much as the NHS, the Welfare State, and charities like Mind caught me when I fell, I believe writing also played its part. For before I was sectioned to the old Victorian asylums – I was in Claybury, Friern, and Banstead – I had already entered another kind of asylum, the Asylum of Poetry.

In the grounds of my asylum I came upon Patrick Kavanagh on a bench, Yeats by the lake, Hopkins in the chapel, Keats in a sunlit meadow. I began to develop an inner life that tried to make sense of my condition, to work out what had happened to me, to salvage some shreds of dignity in the hard places where I found myself. I think I came to that realm all writers find, a place of refuge, of calm, of peace, and I took time to explore its airy green grounds. For me writing and this inward sense of

asylum have always gone together.

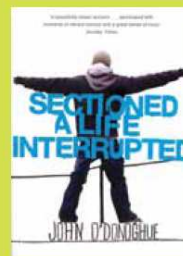
I don't just mean the institutions I was placed in – I mean the place where the mind can find enough imaginative space to make sense of our experience.

I was lucky to come through. Eventually I was able to get off the psychiatric merry-go-round and go to university. I had three O Levels and an Elementary Swimming Certificate but the University of East Anglia let me in.

So I'm grateful to all who helped me. And to the poets I read, and to the likes of Hilary Mantel, Studs Terkel, Jenny Diski.

In dreams begin responsibilities.

Priced at £8.99 plus postage and packing (with a discount of 10 per cent available to Mind members) Sectioned: A life interrupted can be purchased from Mind Publications.



To place your order or for further information call the publications team on: 0844 448 4448 or email at: publications@mind.org.uk