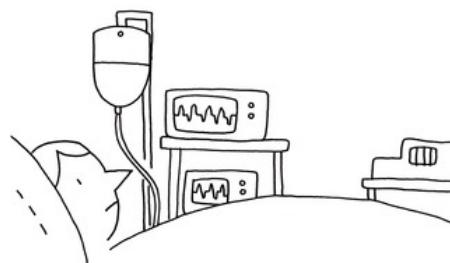


THE HOSPITAL SUITE

John Porcellino



The Hospital Suite

John Porcellino

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Poetic musings on illness and the art of getting by from a mini-comics master

The Hospital Suite is a landmark work by the celebrated cartoonist and small-press legend John Porcellino—an autobiographical collection detailing his struggles with illness in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In 1997, John began to have severe stomach pain. He soon found out he needed emergency surgery to remove a benign tumor from his small intestine. In the wake of the surgery, he had numerous health complications that led to a flare-up of his preexisting tendencies toward anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder. *The Hospital Suite* is Porcellino's response to these experiences—simply told stories drawn in the honest, heart-wrenching style of his much-loved *King-Cat* mini-comics. His gift for spare yet eloquent candor makes *The Hospital Suite* an intimate portrayal of one person's experiences that is also intensely relatable.

Porcellino's work is lauded for its universality and quiet, clear-eyed contemplation of everyday life. *The Hospital Suite* is a testimony to this subtle strength, making his struggles with the medical system and its consequences for his mental health accessible and engaging.

The Hospital Suite Details

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Author : John Porcellino

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Comics

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From Reader Review The Hospital Suite for online ebook

Steve Lawson says

John Porcellino is one of my few real heroes. His self-published King-Cat Comix have been a part of my life for about twenty years, and I never cease to marvel at the way John P. can create a story, a mood, a work of art with such economy.

Usually, John P. focuses on how small details can open up into larger meditations on life. His work is auto-biographical, but he doesn't make a spectacle of himself. Longtime fans knew that he had health problems and a divorce in the late 1990s, but he hadn't written about them until now.

This new book has most of the familiar hallmarks of King-Cat--the pets, the humor, the self-consciousness--but in the service of a more high-stakes story, a series of serious health problems that land John in the hospital and send him from one doctor to another in a search for some of the root causes of his illness.

Derek Royal says

A series of three stories that, together, produce a moving glimpse into the multiple health issues facing John Porcellino from several years back.

Myriam St-Denis Lisée says

Une bande dessinée magnifique qui explore avec vérité et profondeur les obsessions humaines.
Un puissant exercice autobiographique.
(lu en français sous le titre "Chroniques cliniques").

Danielle says

This reminded me in a way of *Stitches*, but only in that both are graphic memoirs about physical ailments that I have great reservations about. I disliked *Stitches* more than I disliked this, but I definitely had some issues with *The Hospital Suite*, even though my final thoughts are mixed.

The art was awful. I don't usually say that about graphic novels, because I can usually see how other people would be into it, but this was so sloppy and basic. It almost, in a way, reminded me of the art in *It's Such a Beautiful Day* in how simple it was, but the film was much more profound than this book was.

I feel like the sections could have been ordered better: it jumps from his time in the hospital to his mental illness (out of chronological order), then jumps to his anti-meds period. And while I greatly related to his sections on mental illness (depression, anxiety, OCD, etc.), even to the point that some of the compulsions that he was running through were things that I do in my daily life, I thought he was insufferable.

And from someone who relates to him, I get it. I get why people do certain things, and how it feels like mental illness is out of your control, and that mental illness is running the person, rather than being a person with mental illness. That said, I empathized more with his girlfriend (who was barely developed) when she reacted to the changes in him. I wish I sympathized with him, but I don't. I don't feel for all of the time he spent trying to "authentically" fix himself. I might have sympathized with the time he spent in the hospital, but by the end of the book, I wasn't thinking about that. The lack of cohesion throughout the memoir meant that while I thought the beginning was alright, it wasn't that relevant at the end.

When I finished the book, I was leaning towards 3 stars, because I was like, "hey, I get it, I've been there." After thinking about it, I was more angry about this than I originally thought - what relatability I enjoyed in my read was lost in the way Porcellino wrote his story and the attitude that he held towards the possible solutions in his life. Others might enjoy this more than I did, but I genuinely hope the author's writing is stronger in his comics than in his own life story.

Stephanie (aka WW) says

Damn, OCD is a bitch. I never understood just how bad it was. I know depression. We've been introduced, thank you very much. But, OCD...I thought it was just a lot of hand-washing. It's so much more. John Porcellino somehow made me experience OCD through simple line drawings. John's been through hell and lived to tell the tale. He's had more than just OCD. He's had severe, unexplained medical issues, a hearing issue (normal sounds are too loud), depression, you name it. And he keeps drawing through it all. Amazing.

Raina says

Several different pieces about the author's experiences with bodily dysfunction. While totally educational (for someone who hasn't had a lot of medical treatment), the constant physical pain was rather overwhelming (which, don't get me wrong, I totally get was probably how it felt to live these stories).

I found myself reflecting on how Porcellino works at all - I think I would have appreciated a little more context to his life. Was he ill from childhood? Or was all of this sudden? I feel like the experience would feel different depending on your personal norm.

His line drawings feel very much like something straight from the brain onto the page, like they could come from a sketchbook.

I wonder if my experience of this would be different if I'd read something else that he'd written. I feel like there's an assumption that one is familiar with his work.

I think my favorite part was the selection of Anxiety Comics at the end, where he shows what it's like to live with anxiety problems from the inside.

Robert says

Every few years D + Q puts out another book by John Porcellino and the world seems like a better place to

me. My full review on tcj.com: <http://www.tcj.com/reviews/the-hospit...>

David Schaafsma says

Porecellino has a really messed up body and mind and doesn't mind our knowing it. This graphic memoir tells the long story of what would appear to be multiple chemical imbalances that have almost completely devastated his life, creating numerous physical problems, and also mental problems, all of which he fearlessly shares with us in his simple, straightforward, clean-line way. This is long, longer than it needs to be for this reader, though with its simplicity you can read it quickly. That simplicity in the drawing adds to the sense of honesty, of complete self-disclosure. I think anyone who has suffered depression, been crippled by OCD, anxiety AND all the physical ailments Porcellino has had will relate to it very well and gain some comfort from it. After all, he has gone through all this (and all the job/marriage/other relationship issues that come with all of the above).. and he STILL keeps writing comics... I think that's a service to all of us that he shares his challenges with others who have similar issues. Maybe it's the Buddhism and the comics that have most helped him survive.

Dov Zeller says

The loosely interweaving stories in this book seem to me a meditation on time, love and illness, and maybe even a meditation on meditation. Porcellino shows us a strange connectedness of moments across a landscape of troubled years that gradually come together in the form of a greater awareness until Porcellino is able to take definitive action on his own behalf. That is a relief. For a long time, he struggles to find helpful, meaningful medical care, and to make sense of his own experiences, and everything that might ground him tends to collapse, either because he holds it too tight or withdraws entirely. I don't know that this book is uplifting, but it's brave and honest and I'm pretty sure it is a gift of hope. If there is an underlying message it might be something along these lines: to be awake and alive is no easy thing, but if we listen closely, we can hear the textured, miracle music of that journey.

Sean says

John Porcellino writes the long-running comic zine *King Cat* and has published numerous book-length collections and graphic novels. In his past stories he has often alluded to the various physical and mental health issues he's struggled with since the late 1990s. This book chronicles these issues in three parts, each of which focuses on one thread of his health history. While John's comics are almost always autobiographical to some degree, this book contains the most intimately personal work he's published so far. He lays bare all the pain and torment he's experienced, and the detrimental effects it's had on his personal life. But it is not only a dark story. Through a self-styled combination of naturopathic and allopathic therapies, coupled with a steady devotion to Zen Buddhism, John has since gotten to a much healthier place. His book can now hopefully serve as an inspiration to others who are facing health issues that at times appear insurmountable. It's also a fine achievement for a cartoonist and writer now working at the peak of his creativity.

Dar says

Simple, elegant line drawing expressed the pain the author felt in this medical memoir. I know that personal medical issues do not always have a happy ending, but I felt the story was unsatisfying. The author turned to Western medicine only when he was desperate, and frequently undid the gains by ending treatment early and trying to get new diagnoses from natural health practitioners. I have not walked in his shoes and I'm sure he knew what made him feel best for symptom management. But I found it a hard read.

Hannah says

This felt like reading *Epileptic* all over again.

At first, I was engrossed with a story of chronic illness and the way family reacts to it - enough so that I could ignore the bad art. Then things took a turn for the worse.

After the halfway point, the book shifted from being something you could give to a friend with a "Look! You're not alone!" awkward smile into "Look! Doctors are to blame for everything!"

This was also the point where it shifted from being about maybe-Crohn's to OCD and pyroluria (one of those diseases you pay talk show hosts to "learn" that you have even though it's not recognized by the medical community.)

Like the *Epileptic* graphic novel, the MC here has a poorly-understood, chronic condition. And like *Epileptic*, questionable medical and cult choices are made while disregarding everything science has to say because *of course* you're going to do anything to fix this. As in, "let's lie about all the pills we're taking," "let's ignore the placebo effect," "let's not follow medication directions, then blame the doctors," etc.

I'm sure this all sounds like victim blaming, but I think the book's overall attitude (and reliance on self diagnoses) contributes to a poisonous attitude surrounding mental health issues.

Bill says

"The Hospital Suite" is a series of inter-related stories about the author's battles with both physical and mental illnesses over the course of many years, while balancing his cartooning career and relationships. The art style is simple but expressive -- black and white line drawings, hand-lettered -- which adds to the personal feel of Porcellino's experiences. The art did frustrate me sometimes, however, such as how the author draws himself in a variety of different styles and looks throughout, so there's an overall lack of identity. (Maybe that's intentional?) Porcellino's ability to struggle on through many illnesses and conditions to continue working on his art is admirable; it's also fascinating to see how his spiritual side gave him the insight to keep pushing forward in the face of horrible circumstances, especially when things looked darkest.

The stories gave me a much better understanding of OCD and related mental health challenges. We joke about people having OCD about things lining up properly, but here, Porcellino shows the impact of completely irrational thought processes that can't be silenced or ignored -- particularly at his most stressful times of his life.

It was painful for me to read parts of the narrative where Porcellino veers off from effective treatment regimens or doctor's appointments. I know from family experience about how draining it is to have unexplained health issues, but I felt frustrated sometimes with how he addressed his symptoms and conditions -- particularly when he ends up walking out on a visit to a doctor who has very realistic concerns about the effects of the pesticides the author was exposed to in a previous job. That part made me want to yell at the author; he even includes a footnote that this isn't a choice he'd advise for anyone else.

Finally, I wish that the narrative was a bit more linear; the sections on his physical health and mental health follow two different narrative tracks, sometimes overlapping, but sometimes the details don't seem to line up (such as where he's living at certain points in his life, or when certain conditions worsened.) There also seems to be an assumption here that the reader is familiar with his other biographical works, which takes away from the self-contained nature of these stories. I'm intrigued, though, to go back and explore his previous works and learn more about the life of this artist who fought on through health issues that I couldn't comprehend experiencing myself.

Peter Derk says

I've decided to try a new thing here on Goodreads. Basically, unless I think something is a 5 or a 1, I won't be giving it a star rating.

There are a couple reasons, and I'll list them here in the interest of full disclosure:

First and foremost, I'll be putting in a proposal to Boss Fight Books, and I'm hoping to interview the publisher for LitReactor. And while I still want to talk about some of the contents, I'm not going to tear apart a book from a publisher I'm going to try and work for/with. I guess you could view this as the death of my honesty, but I don't see it that way at all. I think this is me being honest about how it's impossible for me to be objective in this situation, and I'm proud to be able to tell you and be upfront about it. My objectivity is pretty questionable when I'm reviewing a small press I want to work for, and I think I'll better serve everyone by being honest about it.

Second, for me personally, I think the star system doesn't really work. I can only tell you what I thought of something, but I think I'd rather use my words in the space provided than just click a star. It's just too easy to make a snap judgment and give something a two-star rating, when really it might deserve more. And while that doesn't matter much to me, it probably really sucks for the author.

Now, all that said, I'm still going to 5-star and 1-star stuff. The reason being, 5-star books deserve 5-star attention. If I give something 5 stars, it's because I think it's truly great. And I'm not too generous with those. I've got 87 5-star ratings on here, which amounts to 8% of the books I've starred.

Also, 1-star reviews will still be happening. Because I believe in that too.

So cheers to a new system, and we'll see how it goes.

Susie says

I read this book with tears streaming down my face. If you are prone to depression, have had any kind of mysterious illness or medical mystery, have seen a loved one suffer through medical treatment, or are simply a compassionate person, expect this one to hit you hard. Especially the eponymous story.

I have always loved the work of John P. and the deceptive simplicity of his work. His work is so relatable; Reading it, he feels like a long lost friend. And maybe it's that feeling of knowing him through the years -- combined with his perfect pitch story telling and simple, effective line work -- that affected me so much.

These stories are united by hospital visits, psychological issues, allergies, pain. Things that hurt just to read about.

It's a beautiful autobiographical graphic memoir (MariNaomi tells me this is the preferred terminology for non fiction comics) told in shorter vignettes about true helplessness, illness and depression; striving to find solace in simplicity, in religion, in acceptance, in self-imposed rules; change and recurrent themes in life.

"I guess I just need to act as if I'm going to survive." p.75

"Maisie... don't forget -- whatever happens -- my whole heart loves your whole heart..." to his cat. p. 78
