

The Makings of JN Adam Memorial Hospital, Her Inside Voice

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Having an over-developed and generous amount of hard-wired “what’s that?” and “why?”s about everything from early childhood to present day has been both a blessing (for me) and a curse (for others). Being told I can’t or shouldn’t has only made the temptation sweeter, and the effort to do the opposite stronger. More often than not, I have come away unscathed and have learned much. Serendipity also has had a habit of frequenting my life and the paths I follow. In this particular instance, what began as curiosity evolved into an obsession and has now culminated in a book.

One of these “meant to be” moments was when I first laid eyes on the JN Adam Memorial Hospital back in 2001. It touched off something compulsive inside of me, calling to my already passionate fascination with architecture, history, mysteries and photography.

When I saw what was inside on my first visit, I felt the power, beauty and energy that permeates the entire grounds. I started researching the back story, but nothing I found seemed complete to me or said much about why it was sitting there unused or what circumstances kept it in such an idyllic abandoned limbo. That in itself turned my curiosity into an overwhelming need to tell the story through photographs; to bring awareness to as many people as possible about this wonderful gem sitting out on its lonely hilltop progressively falling in on itself as time passed.

When I saw a news article about the Museum of disABILITY History planning a book about the old Buffalo State Hospital a few years back, I knew this could be the method and the means to tell this story. After a few emails and meetings to pitch my ideas and presenting some of the several hundreds of photos I had taken over the years, the Museum asked me to be a speaker in their “Dialogues on Disability” series. This would bring to light my visual discoveries of this amazing place. I could share my consuming concerns about its present condition. Suppressing my public speaking phobia and semi-agoraphobic nature, I agreed.

With Doug Platt’s (Museum’s curator) historical expertise and unending patience getting me used to relating my experiences there, the event night finally came. Doug Farley (Museum’s director) delivered the introduction with the finesse of a seasoned ambassador. With a deep breath and clenched jaw, Platt and I went on to a good-sized crowd. He kept me on my game. Sweaty hands and gut knots aside, he brought me out of my shell to verbally share my enthusiastic and emotional attachment to JNA previously only depicted through my photographs.

The coup de grace was when James Boles, EdD (Museum’s founder) came up to me immediately afterwards and asked, “So, you want to do a book?” My ecstatic exuberance and adrenaline overloaded reply was, “You bet I do!” The Q&A and meet-and-greet which followed introduced me to people who were also touched by the place in one way or another. They told me that my images really moved them and captured the beauty and essence of what was and still remain despite the present deplorable conditions. Now this very personal project was catapulted into taking my story public.

To add to the exposure, I’ve wanted put back onto JN Adam, to bring to light not only the place itself, but the criminal landlord neglect going on out there. Due to my persistence in telling the

story to any and all who will listen, Western New York Heritage magazine is publishing an article of mine along with some of my images of JNA in their 2016 fall issue. Here are some excerpts from it, titled “The JN Adam Memorial Hospital – A Woman in Shadow.”

“Most Western New Yorkers have never set their eyes on or have ever even heard of the JN Adam Memorial Hospital located in the pastoral hilltops of Perrysburg, NY. One reason could be that it is well hidden amongst the surrounding woodlands and high elevation. There’s also often thick fog or haze up there, making even the russet red tiled rooftops invisible more frequently than not.”

“This illuminated palace of healing was a sight to behold... Every exterior and interior, doorway, railing, staircase and window was given Coxhead’s fond attention to detail and sophistication.”

“Since tuberculosis patients often took months if not years to recover, this majestic hospital was meant to prevent boredom, promote emotional well-being and provide the best care for those who would probably spend a good deal of time there.”

“On clear days, Canada, Buffalo and Lake Erie were visible from the upper decks as were superb 360 degree views of rolling hills, farmland and forests under wide open azure skies oftentimes scattered with billowing cotton ball clouds.”

“This once thriving, independent community of patients, employees and townspeople, its historic buildings and rich history is now the potential victim of demolition crews or total natural reclamation.”

“Someone has to care enough to get the ball rolling and make this happen. Soon. Ownership has to be identified and that party needs to be held accountable for the deplorable conditions there and the blatant lack of care and upkeep. Accountability has constantly been a drawn out series of debates, denials and finger-pointing from both the City of Buffalo and New York State and contentious lawsuits have proved futile.”

(To read the article in its entirety, go to Western New York Heritage’s website at wnyheritagepress.org).

Along the way, I’ve had the pleasure of meeting even more people who were or are directly connected to JNA. We all share a kinship – we are ex-patients, health care professionals, museum directors and curators, history buffs, preservationists, college students, obsessed photographers, explorers and more. Many of them have allowed me to share their words and experiences. Now I can share the stories so you too, can take a rare written and visual journey. My book is now available as the latest edition of the Museum’s Abandoned History Series. It’s titled *JN Adam Memorial Hospital, Her Inside Voice*. Historical insight is provided by Doug Platt, curator at the Museum. You can purchase it in the Museum’s store and online, store.museumofdisability.org or Amazon.com.

This eye-opening volume deals with the original and subsequent purposes of this stunning, significant historical and architecturally relevant institution being left to rot. All proceeds from book sales benefit the Museum of the disABILITY History.

