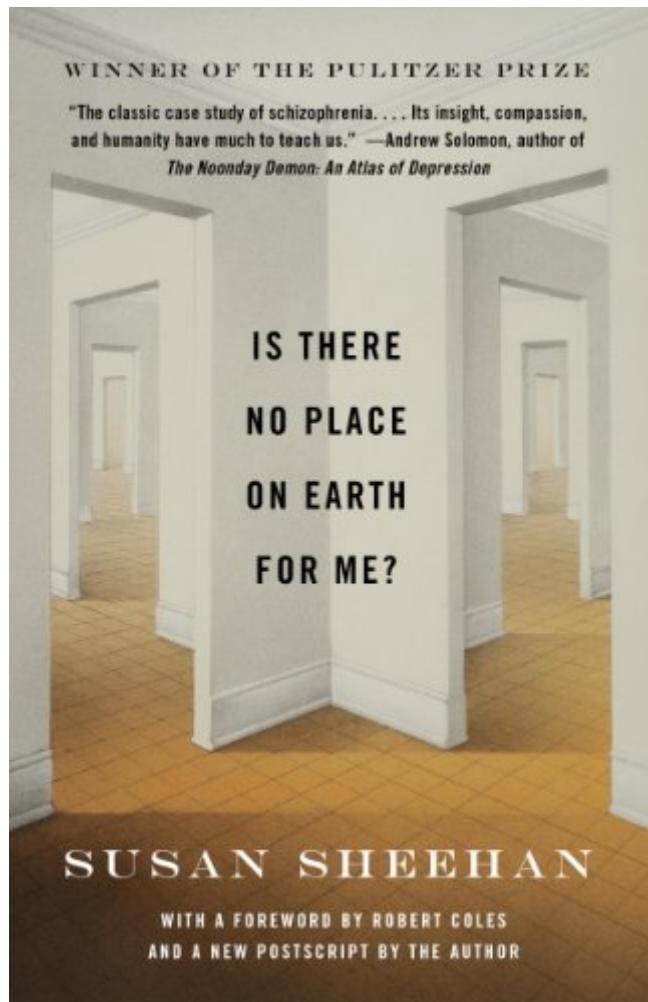


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# Is There No Place On Earth For Me



## Synopsis

This renowned journalist's classic Pulitzer Prize-winning investigation of schizophrenia—now reissued with a new postscript—follows a flamboyant and fiercely intelligent young woman as she struggles in the throes of mental illness. Sylvia Frumkin was born in 1948 and began showing signs of schizophrenia in her teens. She spent the next seventeen years in and out of mental institutions. In 1978, reporter Susan Sheehan took an interest in her and, for more than two years, became immersed in her life: talking with her, listening to her monologues, sitting in on consultations with doctors—even, for a period, sleeping in the bed next to her in a psychiatric center. With Sheehan, we become witness to Sylvia's plight: her psychotic episodes, the medical struggle to control her symptoms, and the overburdened hospitals that, more often than not, she was obliged to call home. The resulting book, first published in 1982, was hailed as an extraordinary achievement: harrowing, humanizing, moving, and bitingly funny. Now, some two decades later, *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?* continues to set the standard for accounts of mental illness.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I've read and re-read *Is There No Place on Earth for Me* at least a dozen times since its publication. I bought a new copy when I couldn't find the first (after Hurricane Katrina it was easy to forget what was lost and what was saved). I have 2 paperback copies and now the Kindle edition, which was updated by Sheehan and makes it worth the purchase. Sylvia Frumkin is one of the most irritating, obnoxious, imperious, often (unintentionally) hysterically funny, and tragic people I've ever read about, including fictional characters. The book covers some of her childhood and troubled adolescence, when her first major psychotic break occurs, and describes the endless cycle of hospitalizations which consumed the rest of her life. Through her journey we learn a great deal about the history of treatment of mental illness in the USA (especially New York state, where she lived and died) and witness her futile struggles to accomplish goals most adults take for granted, like having an apartment and a job. Some reviewers stated they learned more than they wanted to know about mental health treatment and facilities and Sheehan is very thorough in that regard, but she provides a broader understanding without losing focus on one individual's fate. It's painfully clear Frumkin, and too many others, might have had a slightly easier time if the numerous psychiatrists who treated her had paid attention to her history, especially with medications. The background information shows how the landscape changed over the years, as more foreign, non-English speaking psychiatrists took jobs in state institutions because U.S. doctors could find better-paying jobs elsewhere. This is crucial to understanding some of the problems Frumkin and others deal with as they are misdiagnosed or simply unable to communicate adequately with someone who doesn't speak/understand English sufficiently and lacks cultural familiarity with a foreign country (i.e., the USA). One doctor diagnoses her as manic-depressive because he doesn't realize her wild references to Mary Poppins and other fictional and real people demonstrate typical schizophrenic symptoms. What's more disturbing is the almost whimsical way her medications are prescribed and administered. Under-dosing occurs constantly, failing to note which drugs and doses are more beneficial, and inexplicably lowering doses or switching to another drug without compensating for the dosing requirements/adjustments between the two contribute to Sylvia's problems instead of helping them. Sheehan's unflinching portrayal of the Frumkin family shows the agony of living with a deeply troubled child/sibling while demonstrating how much her parents contribute to her problems. Mrs. Frumkin is too self-involved to realize the antagonistic remarks she frequently makes to Sylvia only make the situation worse and Mr. Frumkin lives in a constant state of denial that blinds him to

the fact his daughter will never be "well." Joyce, Sylvia's older sister, is the most sympathetic family member but she cannot curb her parents' behavior any more than she can control Sylvia, and she has her own demons to battle (almost entirely due to Mr. Frumkin's treatment of her from childhood as an overachiever, never quite meeting his expectations). There is so much more I haven't covered I could write 20 pages and still not be done. It is often funny as hell due to Sylvia's absurd behavior (at times obviously meant to draw others' attention) and particularly non-stop monologues that juxtapose references to her real life, hallucinatory thoughts, and a cast of characters from Paul McCartney to Captain Kangaroo to the "best friend" she ever had, Camilla Costello, "Abbott and Costello's daughter." *Is There No Place on Earth for Me* is exceptional and one of the most moving and enlightening books about schizophrenia, and mental illness treatment, I've ever read. That I frequently laugh out loud probably explains why I can re-read it again and again.

This book should be required reading for all psychiatry residents. I am a professor of psychiatry and read this on the recommendation of my own therapist. I just bought four copies to give to the residents I supervise. This is the story of a patient with schizophrenia, who has spent her life in and out of a state hospital in New York. The author brings the patient, Sylvia, to vibrant life by actually living with her in the hospital. The Pulitzer was well deserved.

Couldn't put it down. Brings to light the shameful way we treat mental illness and the patients who suffer with mental illness. It seems to be America's shame; hide the problem and hide the patient. Then add insult to injury and throw random medications at the problem. The patients are treated as sub-human by their primary caregivers who are usually the dis-enfranchised, poorly educated working class. The hierarchy the mental health wards establish makes everyone a victim with little or no access to resources they need to survive.

I bought this book as I needed it for one of my college classes and I seriously can't put it down. It's a true story of a woman living with schizophrenia and where she fits in, in society. Something that's challenging for her and many others. It brings great insight and understanding which is probably why our professor put this book in our syllabus!! But it's a great read even if you don't have to have it for a college class!

Susan Sheehan spent a few years with a mentally ill woman as she was part of the psychiatric system of New York. Although not current, it is still accurate. Well written; won awards. Read this to

really know what goes on with mentally ill in our country. Actually the system back then (several decades ago) was better than the system today. Hard to believe, but true. At least the patient in this book didn't end up homeless.

This is the one of the most heart-rending books I've read (and re-read). It provides stunning insight into the world of a severely mentally ill human being. The implications about the poor quality of care in the United States available for most of our mentally ill are still relevant several decades after the publication of the book, sadly enough. This edition also includes the details of who Sylvia really was and what happened after the events in this book.

To poignant! So full of hope and honest, yet gripping. I have known all too well mental illness of a child and how it impacts life. How difficult life is for folks who have this disability. They are often bright, able yet caught up in this weird mentality. I am so thankful that research is being done for them. Even New York City prisons are recognizing their struggle. This story helps one to understand that great compassion is required, including love.

I've just re-read this book ... I had first read it when it was published in a series of articles in The New Yorker about thirty years ago ... and it is just as compelling and haunting to me. Through the brilliance of its author, Susan Sheehan, Sylvia Frumkin is brought to life in all her agonized glory. You will never forget her.

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