

## ***Guy Interrupted***

"*Girl Interrupted*" is a movie, but first it was a book by Susanna Kaysen. Having spent some time in the psych hospital myself I always look to others' accounts of their experiences to better understand, make sense of my own. Any way you experience it falling into helpless, hopeless dependency on an institution and it's staff is a frightening experience. Even if it's a relief to have finally given up struggling to manage "at large", it's like going beyond the pale - into an uncertain future with unlikely companions.

Kaysen describes it in her book's first paragraph as a *"parallel universe. There are so many of them: worlds of the insane, the criminal, the cripple, the dying, perhaps the dead as well. These worlds exist alongside this world and resemble it, but are not in it."* I was hooked on her words.

I truly felt like *I* was in another world when I was given a bed in PIC, the psychiatric intensive care ward. That was the only place in there was room in the hospital the night I described my suicide attempt to my psychiatrist. So I spent the night in a very spare room with some eerie howling going on down the hall while others watched a Canada/Russia hockey game in a lounge. I had to make a difficult call to inform my out-of-town parents about my situation in this surreal environment. I had to negotiate to get my glasses.

Kaysen ends that first chapter: *"Another odd feature of the parallel universe is that although it is invisible from this side, once you are in it you can easily see the world you came from. Sometimes the world you came from looks huge and menacing, quivering like a vast pile of jelly, at others it is miniaturized and alluring, a-spin and shining in its orbit. Either way it can't be discounted.*

*Every window on Alcatraz has a view of San Francisco."*

Susanna Kaysen spent two years in that institution and much later in her life addressed that period in her powerful and insightful book.

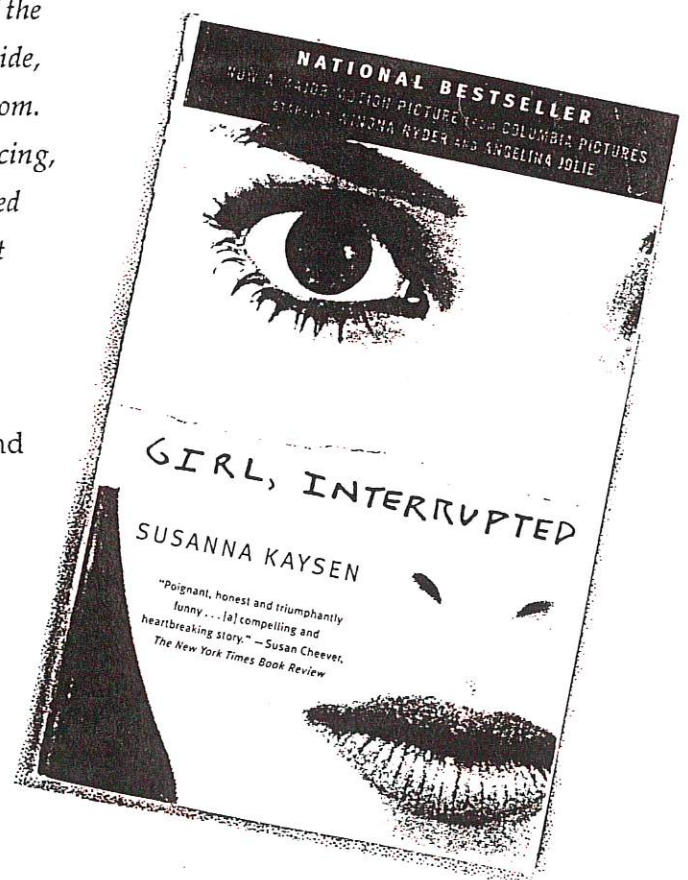
Winona Ryder played her in the film. I'm still doing research, but I think maybe Johnny Depp. . .

Bruce Saunders Mar 5/01



Susanna Kaysen

*Girl, Interrupted*



Susanna Kaysen is also the author of the novels *Asa*, *As I Knew Him* and *Far Afield*. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.