

I Wish I Could Remember Their Names

It's impossible to forget. And, of course, there are certain things that bring back vivid memories--

Practically any song popular in the summer of 1966. There was always a slightly out-of-tune radio blaring the top ten, usually in competition with the T.V. on the opposite side of the dayroom.

The word "ladies" used as a command, to herd us around--to the cafeteria, to the backyard, back to the ward. I used to wonder if there wasn't some term that would sound less demeaning, but the tone would have made any word as ugly.

Or keys, clipped to a belt. Those keys were a symbol, as official as a badge, of status, of power, of the ability of the wearer to leave at any time. I used to wish they would hide them away in their pockets, but, of course, symbols of power are to be used, and enjoyed.

For years, each time I tried to express the pain to anyone, to people I thought were my friends, I was told not to be bitter. And I supposed they were right, and I tried not to be bitter. If I was supposedly "normal" the best way was to be like all the other normals. And if they thought mental hospitals were places where sick people went for help, then I'd better appear to think it too. In those days, when my only instinct was to hide, I never would have considered another ex-patient for a friend.

Only after I learned to accept my identity as a mental patient was I able to remember two people I met while in hospital, who gave me two of the best pieces of advice I ever received.

The first came shortly after I was admitted to a new hospital and was immediately taken off all medication. Over the preceding few months, all varieties of tranquilizers, anti-depressants, mood elevators and all the rest had been tried on me, with little effect that I could see. Now, it was decided to "evaluate" me without any drugs, which at least sounded sensible. The only thing I couldn't understand, over the next day or so was why I felt so awful--chills, cramps, a crawling feeling all over my skin. The staff said nothing, and finally another patient explained that I had become addicted to my medication, and was experiencing withdrawal. At least, with that explanation, the pain had a name.

The second occurred at still another hospital, a state hospital, the end of the line. Frightened and alone, a few hours after admission, I sank down on one of the hard dayroom chairs. Over the last few hours, I had had my clothes taken away, had been subjected to a humiliating search, and had been issued a huge and faded cotton dress with the name of the hospital stamped on the back. Feeling lost

and abandoned, I drew up my knees to my chest, buried my face and started to cry quietly. Another patient approached, leaned down beside me, and whispered, "Don't do that; they'll think you're depressed." It was a lesson in survival. Immediately I straightened up and hid any trace of tears. After that I was careful to cry only alone in my room in the middle of the night, quietly.

Those two people should have been my friends. How I wish I could remember their names.

- Judi Chamberlin



Author Judi Chamberlin (top right) and MPA friends, Ursula (top left), Doreen (top center), Eve-Lynne (bottom left) and Jane (bottom right).



The NUTSHELL is looking for short items from other publications to be used as fillers. Readers are invited to clip out and send to us items in the mental health field--articles, cartoons, graphics etc.--

particularly humorous ones which point out the follies and horrors of psychiatry.

Ten cents will be awarded to those whose items are printed; 15¢ to those whose are not.

PRIZES

Psychiatric Diagnosis of the Month

THE CAPTAIN TOOK ME TO THE HOSPITAL, WHERE PSYCHIATRISTS INTERVIEWED ME...

IT'LL TAKE TIME, BUT THERE'S A GOOD CHANCE WE CAN GET YOU BACK TO NORMAL... IF WE CAN GET YOU OVER YOUR TERRIBLE GUILT AND INFERIORITY COMPLEX!



Gulp! Tranquillizer tops aspirins as poison

-Headline in the Vancouver Sun, 8/2/73

FOR

FILLERS

At last, a cure for hiccups!

THORAZINE tablets, concentrate, injection, and syrup, and Thorazine Spanules, all marketed by Smith Kline and French Laboratories, have been reclassified from probably effective to effective by FDA for the control of the manifestations of the manic phase of manic depressive illness, and for the relief of intractable hiccups. "based upon reevaluation of the drug and review of new data submitted," it was reported in the July 27 Federal Register.

Psychiatric News, 10/3/73

SANTA'S HELPERS

DAVIE, Fla. (AP) — Little Jody Dietrich will get a vital heart operation thanks to a \$2,000 donation from a group calling itself the "Broward County Marijuana Dealers Association."

- Portland Oregonian, 11/30/73

More recently, I have learned to be myself, instead of being "normal." It's a long process, still continuing. Now I seek out others who have been mental patients too, as friends and as people to learn from. Following the paths of normalcy meant fitting into a mold, and denying anything in myself outside that pattern. That mental-patients could be friends, supportive of one another, was an idea I was unwilling to face for years.