

The Dirty Little Secret of Concord, New Hampshire

Abstract

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Full-Text

The Dirty Little Secret of Concord, New Hampshire

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This is a personal account of the psychiatric abuse I endured in Concord, New Hampshire, at the hands of the two most prominent psychiatrists there, who held top positions at Concord Hospital and New Hampshire State Hospital, between 1989 and 2002.

I have wrestled with my internal debate over when and how to tell this horrific story, and I have attempted numerous times to make contact with one of the two doctors, because I believed that he essentially meant well. In the extended silence of these years, however, some realisations have dawned on me, and I no longer feel comfortable holding on to a secret that has affected so many people in the community I dedicated myself to, and one I shall always care about. While my own reputation was shattered beyond repair, and I could never again be welcome, the myths that destroyed my precious family life still prevail, and my conscience will no longer abide my silence.

As I have been considering the documentation of these painful events, I saw an example in Monica Cassani's dignified recounting of her own experiences, and I have been inspired by the many survivors (too numerous to name) who have shared with me so intimately over the years I have worked with The Law Project for Psychiatric Rights. The courage of people like Julie Greene and others, who continue to share in comments on my 2011 article, 'After Seroquel' have brought me to the place where it seems like the time is right.

The years leading up to my move to Concord, New Hampshire in 1987 were traumatic, to say the least. My first husband and I had a troubled marriage

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even before the tragic death of our first child, at the age of four and a half months, in 1982. Steve Del Giudice was a high school friend with whom I had kept in touch through college. After years of showing no romantic inclination towards me, quite suddenly in his first year of medical school, he uncharacteristically jumped on a night train during a blizzard in Boston, and showed up uninvited at my doorstep at Syracuse University, declaring passionate love. The full court press continued through the next summer, and upon my graduation in December of 1978, we were married by a justice of the peace who objected to our differing religious backgrounds. Two years later, my new husband's ardor had cooled, and when I slipped a disc in my lower back while in graduate school at Tufts, Steve insisted that I return to my parents' home to recover. Though I could not face it then, the relationship was over.

After medical school, Steve was accepted for internship at Yale–New Haven Hospital, where we rented an apartment in an extremely unsafe neighborhood. I could find no employment, and I spent the year isolated and alone, occasionally making desserts for a friend's restaurant, playing open mics, and writing poetry and songs. My coveted plans to become a psychotherapist had been derailed by ethical concerns following my Internship at a residential treatment center for mostly court referred adolescents while at Tufts. Those concerns revolved around the *DSM-III*. At the end of Steve's Internship under attending physician Sam Their (we called him Dr. Fear), we set off for a two year stint of Public Health Service on the border of Texas and Oklahoma ... a town called Texhoma. There our first daughter, Sarah, was born by caesarian section with her internal organs on the outside, severe scoliosis, and hypoplastic lungs. Steve wept for less than one minute when Sarah died, and he informed me, 'I am not going to do this'. He kept his word.

We spent three years back at Yale, after our time in Texhoma, where Steve completed his residency in Dermatology, and then moved to Pembroke, New Hampshire where he accepted a position at Dartmouth Hitchcock, after ruling out private practice. In my continued optimism and misplaced faith in our marriage, I gave birth to three more children; Emily in 1983 (precisely one year after Sarah), Margaret in 1987, and Jaclyn in 1988.

Cut off from friends and family, and overwhelmed by Steve's bigoted relatives who made no secret of their contempt for me, and for the values with which I intended to raise my daughters, I felt engulfed by despair. I made an appointment to see Dr. David Coursin, who came well recommended as a therapist. David, as he preferred to be called, was larger than life, and in short order I developed a huge crush on him. His seemingly open personality and charismatic style made him the prefect cult leader, and that is precisely what he was. The cult was called, The Essential Experience, and he more or less funnelled

all his patients and their significant others into this 'workshop' loosely based on M. Scott Peck's book, *The Road Less Travelled*. I called it 'The Essential Cult Experience', which made my husband angry, further proving my point.

Unfortunately, my critical thinking was selective. And then there were the drugs. Xanax was represented to me as a helpful agent in therapy; safe, effective, and non-addictive. My thinking and behavior became bizarre. The moment I should have seen red flags waving was when David said to me, 'In my clinical experience, the depth of your pain can only be explained by unremembered early childhood sexual molestation.' I did not see the waving red flags. David had become my hero, and I was a Believer. The Garden Path David Cousin led me down involved repeated hospitalisations for suicidal thought and actions, and a six week stay at New Hampshire State Hospital. Radical Attachment Disorder was apparently neither a reality nor a concern to any professionals involved, and I returned home to a severely traumatised two year old who remained plastered to my body for the next several years. I also returned home to a list of threats from my husband, who made it clear to me that he had everything he needed to take our children away from their mother permanently. I had absolutely no idea that the drugs I had been taking had been the cause of my bizarre behavior and suicidality.

I have heard it said that creativity is a survival instinct, and it's fair to say that I would be proof of that. Writing songs had saved me during my Freshman year at Georgetown, where I had been raped during a band audition. After the torture David Coursin has subjected me to, followed by the death of my beloved father (who was falsely accused of a heinous crime by his drugged and delusional daughter), songwriting once again became my salvation. My rise to Folk Star Fame (a decidedly relative distinction) was fast, furious, and unluccrative.

It was during this time that Steve found a more suitable partner in a colleague who adored him. And it was during this time that we moved to an elite community (Hopkinton), and I lost control of my children as they hit adolescence. When I demanded family counseling intervention, my husband refused and stated that If anyone in the family was going to see a psychiatrist, it was going to be me. And so it was, once again, that I stepped back into the belly of the beast.

It was 1998, and Dr. Karl Lanocha (a former neighbor) ran Concord Hospital's psychiatric unit, Five West. Dressed impeccably in Italian suits, looking quite the professional, he informed me that I had a chemical imbalance, and that I was in good company with many creative people. Prozac, a safe and effective wonder drug would fix this chemical imbalance, and my pursuant 'hypomaniac' reaction to fluoxetine was proof positive that I had a neuro-degenerative disease

of the brain called Bipolar Disorder. I would have to take drugs for the remainder of my life, and scale back my plans and expectations.

As I became suicidal again, and my personality changed dramatically, every drug in his arsenal was thrown at me (all of which were 'safe and effective') and my deterioration was 'the worsening of my disease'. I endured over thirty hospitalisations with no visitors. My husband kept our children away because 'they didn't want to go'. Staff was cautioned not to interact with me. They looked down when I spoke to them, lonely and starved for conversation.

Videotapes, made by David Coursin, were shown repeatedly to patients explaining to us that our brains were broken because we did not produce enough serotonin. These were detailed depictions of synaptic clefts, presented with absolute certainty. Patients made fun of these tapes, and also of Dr. Lanocha, who was unanimously seen as cold and cruel ... unless one was wealthy and/or socially connected. Abandoned by my husband and children, I was no longer either. The last remaining shred of human dignity I felt was the ritual of dressing and putting on makeup, for which Lanoch called me into his office and, with a contemptuous sneer, informed me that I had earned the new diagnosis of narcissism.

When Steve Del Giudice informed me that he had received permission from our children to divorce me, he threatened that if I contested the divorce I would never see my children again. I capitulated in fear. No longer married to a doctor, Lanocha made up a story that I had told someone that I was in love with him, and dumped me with a referral to Concord Community Mental Health; it was a blessing in disguise. There, I was treated with kindness and consideration. I was treated like a human being. A year went by as I tried in vain to see my girls. I had joint custody, which Steve refused to honor, continuing to hide behind the excuse that the kids didn't want to see me. I was in no position to afford a home my daughters would feel comfortable visiting, and finally I made the decision to move to Asheville, North Carolina, to make a fresh start.

At the time, it never even occurred to me that I could have had legal recourse, or even that I had rights. What makes this particularly relevant, is that I was moot court champion at Syracuse University in 1977, and the same university gives out a yearly award in my parents' names; The Dan and Mary Louise Rubenstein Social Justice Award.

I left Concord in 2003 still believing the chemical imbalance lie, and convinced I had a brain disease requiring drug treatments, which sucked the life out of me and kept me sick, disabled and debilitated. I chalked my severe amnesia up to this supposed disease, unaware of how extensive my memory loss was, or even how severely cognitively impaired I was. I believed that the horror, shame, and degradation of electroshock has been 'medically necessary' as I had

been told. The legacy of this abuse has deeply affected my children, and to this day, as young adults, they have difficulty fathoming that what happened to us was based on a series of lies derived from pharmaceutical marketing.

After I left New Hampshire, David Coursin became Director of New Hampshire State Hospital, and Karl Lanocha opened a TMS Center in Portsmouth, where he continued to promulgate the myth of 'treatment resistant depression' Recently, he moved to Sacramento, California, where he continues to practice Psychiatry.. Both are still revered in New Hampshire as leaders in their profession. As I read the oft repeated words of Dr. Ronald Pies that the chemical imbalance lie was never promoted by well informed psychiatrists, I see in my mind's eye the videotapes of David Coursin, which must have been shown to possibly thousands of people in New Hampshire. And when I remember being told that prozac was safe and effective, I wonder how Coursin and Lanocha missed news of Congressional hearings over prozac suicides years before, or why no one thought of me when all the suicide warnings were placed on the drug labels in 2004. I sometimes calculate what my abuse has cost the taxpayers.

I no longer burn with rage, although I certainly did for a number of years after researching the drugs I was given, and discovering how much memory I had lost. The last six years spent in excruciating protracted drug withdrawal have done for me what I have heard Gabor Mate talk about regarding some cancer patients. These years have made me a better human being. My conviction to help other people tell their stories of iatrogenic illness and medical abuse does not come from a desire for revenge, because justice must be something very different by nature. Justice would involve the taking of responsibility, and action to make amends. Justice must be healing.

I see myself today as a resilient person; whole and fully human. I know that the tragedies of my life have taught me empathy and compassion, and that the suffering has led me to a life imbued with meaning and purpose, as well as the continuous struggle of understanding that human trafficking is now a part of many of the institutions in our country which were designed to 'help'. The fact that my own suicidality in New Hampshire was drug induced does not for a moment mitigate the hell on earth that was childhood for my precious daughters, and this dirty secret of Concord, New Hampshire, which continues unchallenged today, is a threat to other families, and other children. The only solution is the disinfectant of sunlight.