

Living With Schizophrenia

Foreword by A. Hoffer, M.D., Ph.D.

Here is another anecdote for the Living with Schizophrenia series. This journal has and will run first person accounts of schizophrenia and other disabling diseases. Medicine ought to be proud of its use of anecdotes for without them there would have been no medicine, no psychiatry. Professionals will learn to understand the illness, patients will discover they are not alone and relatives will be able to be more supportive.

Dear Dr. Hoffer:

I am compiling this letter to let you know what is and has happened with me so that you can study my case.

I am feeling much better now, although I'm not completely well yet. I have finally come down to a maintenance dose with respect to the Chlorpromazine (125 mgs.) so I take 25 mgs. at 6:00 p.m. and 100 mgs. at bedtime. Taking 125 mgs. at bedtime as you suggested is not quite enough to take me through the next day. 150 mgs. causes me worry and frustration because it seems to make my memory worse.

I feel that right from birth I was schizophrenic and learned to live with constant depression. I also had a very poor sense of well-being. My muscles used to hurt so much at certain times that I found it very difficult to

do physical labour. I was always afraid to tell members of my closest family that I didn't feel good. I wanted to confide in someone real badly but couldn't.

As long as I can remember I have been sick. As a boy (from birth to grade 11), I experienced the following: at different times my muscles ached so hard that I found it difficult if not impossible to work physically. At other times I felt that people were controlling my mind. I didn't have enough of my own thoughts because things around me kept intruding on my mind. Up until grade 11 (17 years of age) I couldn't tell anybody that I didn't feel good. I had an illogical fear which prevented me from confiding in someone. People tended to think I was hard headed. I wasn't. I came across that way because I was trying to keep people from controlling my thoughts.

In grade 11, I came out of my schizophrenia by a miracle. I was going with a girl that I really liked. The problem was though that I was afraid to show her any affection (both physical and social). In time she began to think that I was not being very nice and possibly that I didn't like her. She started acting very negatively towards me. One day out of frustration with myself I tried to hurt her feelings. Of course this only made things worse and I felt

guilty. I prayed about it and suddenly I felt I must apologize to her. At meal time I wolfed down my food and rushed to school to apologize. I met her in the school hallway before classes and said sorry. She glared at me and strode off. As soon as this happened all of my fears left me and I lost my schizophrenia. I was no longer afraid to show my feelings. When the illness left me it felt as though something inside of my body left me. Also my mind cleared up and I became totally relaxed with myself. People no longer controlled my thoughts.

After I graduated from grade 12, I worked for a beekeeper. I feel that I was a very good worker but had terrible problems with depression, irritability, mental confusion, and improper sleep. The mental confusion I now believe was caused by my brain allergies. Later on I worked for another beekeeper. I had about 140 of my own beehives at this time. I became steadily more depressed and confused. I used to think I had to serve everybody like a slave. At this time I had another girlfriend. Finally when the confusion became unbearable and partly (in my opinion) because of the sweets and junk food I ate, I became schizophrenic again. This made my anxieties surge and I started to hear voices which were scoffing at me. Now a new chapter in my life began. I entered the drug scene (psychiatric drugs) in the fall of 1979.

I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital where immediately after shock treatments and medication, the voices went away. My confusion was unbearable though and my mind was constantly racing. After two months I was released. About 6 months later I came out of my schizophrenia for about 5 minutes. Then I was sick again. I remember this very vividly. This only frustrated me worse. Ever since then I feel that my mind was degenerating.

Here is a summary of the different meds I've been on and their effects on me: i. Navane made my eyes terribly tense and my head hurt from it. ii. Valium took away much of my fears and made me brave enough to face my irritability and depression. As a result I was violent and unpredictable, iii. Ceretol gave me a small measure of self-control, but didn't relieve anything else. iv. Anafranil made me gentle and gave me slight relief to depression, v. Fluphenazine, Neuleptil, an

anti-depressant, and procyclidine were taken together. I became suicidal, feelingless, violent, and very anti-social. At this time I took a gun and shot at my parents' house when they weren't home. I contemplated shooting myself. vi. Because I couldn't cope with the terrible feelings the 4 drugs caused I went against my doctor's instructions and threw out all of my meds, except for neuleptil which at the time was my favourite drug because it relaxed me and took me out of reality.

The turning point in my life came when I diagnosed myself and took megadoses of vitamins for about 1¹/₂ months. My depression, violence, and suicidal tendencies disappeared almost immediately, vii. Thioridazine was given to me around this time and was the first drug that didn't have horrible side effects. It helped keep my mind under control without giving me the terrible effects that previous meds gave me. viii. Chlorpromazine was taken once after consulting a physician at a time when I had tremendous anxiety. I took it with thioridazine. This drug combination made my eyes screw up into my head (even with cogentin as a side effects pill) and I felt like I was going crazy. I was bedridden for several days. I then went off my chlorpromazine. The thioridazine kept me slowly recovering (I quit eating sweets also) until because of my brain allergies I reached a plateau at which time I couldn't recover any further. Out of frustration I began eating sweets because they gave me a high. Most of my old symptoms returned. ix. Dalmane allowed me to sleep and wasn't addictive for the period of time I used it (about 3 to 4 months).

I was getting terribly distressed again. In November, 1982 someone referred me to Dr. Glen Green. Dr. Green gave me megadoses of vitamin C intravenously for a three day fast. He also took me off all my sweets and junk food and tested me for 21 days for brain allergies. I discovered 19 allergies. Here is what some of the allergies did: i. Peas made me very tense and I couldn't talk to people. ii. Rice made me feel beautifully tranquil and made me stop thinking. iii. White fish (an ocean variety) made my mind race and I couldn't hold on to thoughts. iv. Poultry made me anti-social and I couldn't sleep, v. Oranges made me disorientated, fearful,

nervous, a stuffy nose, and stimulated my adrenaline. vi. Dairy products made me emotional and I had to listen to loud music. vii. Pork sausage made me disorientated, insecure, lose track of who I was, and made my muscles feel rubbery. viii. Cottage cheese made people feel miles away and I became extremely introverted.

Here is a short description of my 21 day food test: I was allowed three meals a day. Each meal consisted of a single food. If I got a reaction I would describe it and would clear my digestive system with 4 tablespoons of ascorbic acid. This kept me from confusing one reaction with a reaction to another food. At this time I struggled with sensitivities which were caused by overeating and food high in carbohydrate. This also caused weight gain from fluid buildup (edema).

My sugar addiction was so bad that at times I would cry and my hands would shake uncontrollably. After a few months though, I felt relief.

After the Dr. Green allergy tests I went on a 2 week vegetable and fruit diet (Dr. Rogers' elimination diet). The diet cleaned my digestive system. Now I gradually introduced meats, nuts, and later grains. After a few months I went on a diet higher in protein (Dr. Fredrick's diet). I consumed 12 ounces of protein a day, (2 ounces with every meal). Carbohydrates were definitely not allowed. They gave me hypoglycemic attacks. My body produced carbohydrates from fat and protein. Lastly I went to Dr. Abram Hoffer, July of 1983, who adjusted my vitamin treatment. Chlorpromazine alleviated panic attacks which were due to the fast recovery that I was experiencing. Exercise was essential.

Here is a description of the panic attacks: they were a strong feeling of rejecting life (actually hating life) and terrible depression and hatred of the illness. They were also accompanied by a feelingless state brought on by the rapid changes in my body chemistry and my mind. Also I became very violent to the point where I threw furniture around the house. This is one of the reasons chlorpromazine was necessary. The medications calmed me down and gave me some relief. During an attack the medication was increased by 100 mgs. or more so that I would sleep. This lessened the pain of the attack and

enabled me to cope. The worst of the attacks lasted about three months. After this the recovery was much easier.

Presently I am doing very well. Because I'm well, I'm even more sensitive to allergies, carbohydrates, and sugar. I must strictly avoid them at all times.

Some of the things which help keep my mind off of the illness are as follows: i. exercise. ii. music. iii. any excuse to move around. iv. working. v. reading. vi. making myself more important than the world around me (loving myself — having a positive attitude to myself). This attitude eventually made me feel good about my surroundings. Socializing comes all on its own when one is ready. You must have a lot of faith in your doctor and also, as in my case, in God.

Shock treatments were unnecessary I feel (in my case) because my memory was important in helping me look forward to my recovery. My memory of when I wasn't sick gave me something to look forward to. I believe that shock treatments (depending on the case) should not be used to erase the times when a person was well, only to erase the bad times. Drugs which take one out of reality are probably not good because a person doesn't have to learn to cope. Coping is very important to a person's self-image.

Out of all the medications I took I feel the chlorpromazine and thioridazine did me the most good.

I am content now, most of the time, and know that I'll recover completely as long as I stick to the therapy.

When a person is as sick as I was he forgets what it was like to be well. In my case, the first year of my recovery was strictly, due to faith in my doctor(s), God, and an obligation (feeling of responsibility) to get well so that my closest friends and relatives would not have to see me suffering. The older you become as a schizophrenic the more you get used to it. The dis-per-ceptions that a person feels makes him unable to fully recognize his condition. It would at this point be very helpful in explaining this to him.

I hope that this letter will help you in your studies Dr. Hoffer.