

The Fryer Research Center

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Dr. Hoffer has asked me to write a brief article for the *Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine* about the work of the Fryer Research Center. I am not an expert on writing briefly on any subject that is especially meaningful to me, but I can't say no to Dr. Hoffer for whom I have such enormous respect and admiration and who was responsible for changing the course of my life.

Barbara, one of our five daughters, was stricken with schizophrenia in the spring of 1960 while she was a student at Indiana University, working for her masters degree in cello. The eight years that followed were, for her, a never-ending torment. She tried suicide twice while she was in the state hospitals and finally, a few days after coming home, she jumped from her ninth floor bedroom window, not taking any chances of failing again.

Those eight years were difficult ones for Barbara's sisters as well. While working for their degrees — three achieved doctorates and one a masters — they gave Barbara as much support as circumstances made possible, as they loved her deeply. And those eight years were a nightmare for me.

During Barbara's first two years at the New York State Psychiatric Institute (P.I.), considered at that time to be one of the world's foremost psychiatric research hospitals, the "schizophrenogenic mother" was in vogue. "I wish the doctor hadn't told me you were the one who made me sick, Mama," Barbara had said to me tearfully during one of her early phone calls. "Now I'm afraid of you. I was never afraid of you before." And soon after that she made her first suicide attempt by slashing her wrists.

Then, during the next two years that Barbara spent at P.I., Family Therapy came in vogue. Instead of keeping families out to honor so-called "confidentiality", families were brought in — the theory being that not only the patient but the entire family was sick, the hospitalized one being just the scapegoat. This kept the young psychiatry

students at P.I. busy, and Barbara's sisters and I cooperated as best we could while Barbara continued to deteriorate.

Finally, after Barbara had been there for four years, P.I. threw up its hands and gave up. They usually didn't keep patients more than three years, they told me. However, Barbara being one of their sickest patients, they had wanted to give her more time to respond to what they called their "total push". Since everything they had tried had made her worse they concluded that the best place for Barbara would be a large state hospital where the doctors and staff were too busy to spend time with a patient and she would be, for the most part, left alone.

Hudson River State Hospital in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., where Barbara spent the next four years, didn't get her better, but it didn't make her worse either. That is, until one of her doctors started having sex with her to "get her over her fear of men". At which point, terrified, Barbara again slashed her wrists and this time almost succeeded in killing herself.

During those years of Barbara's illness I consumed as much literature on the subject of schizophrenia as I could get my hands on, both at P.I.'s library and the library of the New York Academy of Medicine. I read about the psychosocial hypotheses that had been drummed into me, but I could find no controlled studies to substantiate them. I had no way of knowing about the comprehensive account of the large doses of vitamin B₃ for treating acute and sub-acute schizophrenia that was published in Canada in 1957 by Dr. Abram Hoffer, with Dr. Humphrey Osmond, M.J. Callbeck, R.N. and Irwin Kahan, B.A. However, on November 27, 1965, I saw a headline in the *New York Times*, "New Unit Formed on Schizophrenia, Seeks a Biological Basis for the Mental Disorder". Biological basis! I pounced on it, made inquiries, and soon became a charter member of the American Schizophrenia Foundation, as it was called then. A year later I sent for Dr. Hoffer and Dr. Osmond's book *How to Live with Schizo-*

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phrenia that I saw advertised in the *New York Times*, and devoured it. Finally something was making sense. The doctors were discussing schizophrenia as they would discuss any of the major illnesses such as diabetes and Parkinson's that afflict mankind. And they were telling us that substances that occur naturally in the human body such as vitamins and minerals, if administered correctly, would help. They even went so far as to state that in some cases, if the treatment is started soon enough while the disease is still acute, the patient will become free of symptoms or, as Dr. Hoffer expressed it, will become well. It had a wonderful sound. Could it be true?

Barbara was refusing to stay in the hospital now, having been locked up following her second suicide attempt, and was asking to come home. Sick as she was, her doctor was nevertheless encouraging it, anxious — as we learned later — to get her out. His treatment of her was becoming known. I was eager to get her out too, and eager to make a home for her if that were possible.

I wrote to Dr. Hoffer, gave him Barbara's history, and asked him if he thought she would benefit from the mega-vitamin treatment, as the Orthomolecular treatment was called then. He wrote me a long letter in reply, advising me that while the treatment would ease her symptoms and cause her to feel better he doubted, since she had been sick for so long, that it would make her well. Barbara seemed eager to try and so was I, but it was too late. A few days after she came home she took things into her own hands and ended her life.

It was in the spring of 1969, a year after Barbara's death, that I was asked to take on the presidency of the newly formed Schizophrenia Foundation of New York State, the New York chapter of the organization of which I had become a charter member. I welcomed the opportunity, although I questioned whether my training and experience as a professional pianist qualified me. But I was eager to try. I was eager to try anything that might help to break through the resistance already put up by the medical establishment to a treatment that promised to help those suffering from this terrible disease. It was no longer touching my life directly, but how could I forget?

I started by opening an office at the National Arts Club on New York's Gramercy Park, where I had my studio. I conscripted volunteers, sent out literature, took in members and began holding weekly Parents and Relatives meetings and Schizophrenic Anonymous meetings and then, to reach a larger group, began to hold Open Meetings at the Community Church. We were bombarded. As many as one thousand people poured in each night to hear such distinguished physicians as Dr. Abram Hoffer, Dr. Humphrey Osmond, Dr. Carl Pfeiffer, Dr. Alan Cott and others speak. The message was making sense to these people too. They absorbed every word and it seemed to us that they would have stayed all night asking questions if we had allowed it. My office was soon flooded with calls from those seeking the treatment the doctors were talking about, but there were too few doctors to provide it. Also many of those who sought it didn't have the funds to pay for it. It soon became clear that there must be a place where we could send them for the treatment at a price they could afford, and that we must provide it. So we did.

The Fryer Research Center opened its doors in the spring of 1971, in donated space in mid-Manhattan, using donated furnishings and volunteers. We started with one doctor, two weeks later there were two and soon three and then four. The demand was great, the response was great and the results were surprising, most of all to me. I had seen the ravages of schizophrenia and found it difficult to believe that simple things like vitamins and minerals and diet could make a difference — but they did, and they are still doing so.

We have moved seven times since 1971. We have had three medical directors, Douglas Hitchings, M.D., James Watt, M.D. and currently Richard Ribner, M.D., who has been with us for 21 years. We have treated close to twelve thousand patients so far, and they keep coming. We have never had any problem with the profession. Some of our patients see specialists in other fields, and they cooperate with us and we with them.

In addition to diet and supplements, I.M. and I.V. injections of vitamins and related substances are a mainstay of our treatment. Robert Carson, M.D., our associate medical

director for many years, expressed his opinion of the injections this way: "By appropriate use of these injectables, I personally believe that the Center has helped untold numbers of patients who otherwise would be unresponsive." Use Beck, R.N. gave the I.M. injections for twenty years until she retired. Now we have M.D.s who give both the I.M. and I.V. and sometimes the drip.

My daughter Kathy who has a Ph.D. in psychology is associate director of the Center and plays a major role. As for myself, at eighty-seven it is the breath of life for me. But the one really responsible for all of it is Dr. Abram Hoffer. Long may he live!