

One. I Want To Tell You A Story

What I want to tell you about is the mental institution I was in and out of for so many years that I know no dates and it has erased almost a decade out of a natural life for me. I for sure am not trying to be a literary genius, and for sure don't worry if you want to know about the life I got to expose to you.

I was put in the mental institutions for being crazy enough to want to kill myself. Everytime I wanted to kill myself I was just not very good at it, or probably scared of the idea that I had that much power over my own life. This was somewhere between the ages of 21 and maybe 24 or 25. Just as a hobo has amazing tales to tell, I have stories that are true, but shaded only because memory lacks total recall. I will tell you them as I remember them, and where I forget, I will draw between the dotted lines to make the abstract spaces somewhat more clear, drawing the illusions of what that reality was like.

I could hit on the angles of my distorted mind, or society that was even more distorted that drove me once in awhile to pushing myself into the reality it was better to be dead than to admit I was part of this club called life. I would rather just not do that. You guys out there, if there are any reading this, might think this is a case history document and try to study me. I don't want anyone doing a study on me that I don't know about reading a story on why I went insane, remained sane while everything around me was what was actually insane, and I don't think you are sane enough to stay sane after I tell you my story of that anyway.

What I guess I want to tell you is what its like to be caged in a zoo and have it called treatment, therapy, at most a hospital. It really wasn't that bad. Everyone there knew there was no better place to be than all together in rage and secretly making plans to cremate civilization as we understood it.

Nowadays when I think I'm crazy and feel I have to check into the local mental institution, they won't let me in because where I have been is impossible to erase. What they got now just isn't a mental institution. They are Hilton's and treat their guests with every privilege possible. I have to ask to be put in a seclusion room, door unlocked so I can laugh so hard at the changes in treatment until I'm ready to face the reality of being

a U.I.P. boarder in some exclusive membership club and then they let me out. So the story I want to tell is what it was like in its infancy before the hotel chain could expand and get all its luxuries. What it was like to feel terrorized by nurses and doctors, white coats, all the way down to cafeteria food handlers. I could wait until I retire or something to write memoirs. Maybe I will. Maybe these are just notes. But that's what this is about. Why I can't be put in a hospital anymore by even therapists...because I've been "institutionalized too much" as the therapists say. What they say is true, and I will try to tell you stories of what that was like. It takes no imagination for my stories. They all really happened. The ending is that I got out of them alive and I learned how to survive. In between stuff is all I got to tell you now. It will be hard for me to write, because I really hate to remember those times. I don't want you to think it's a lot of "poor me" stuff. I actually saw it from a different perspective. I saw it as the patients and the walls were a sanctuary to get away from you guys.

Two. Locked Doors

It was a chauffeur driven limousine that only rich people ride in that takes people to the crazy house. I had to go there because I was not good enough to deal with what was happening out there. Maybe I was crazy. Maybe it was drugs someone sneaked up on me. Maybe because my dad was killed by some kids in a grocery store and I thought I was responsible somehow. Back then they didn't have a name for it and I didn't know what it was, but now I know I was a victim of tailhooking. Back then it was called an illusion or delusion or hallucination or some kind of personality change because the US Navy would never expose such a horrible crime. I guess what the institution observed was I just didn't want any part of it any more and I thought it was a good time to close that chapter in my life by trying to finalize my life altogether. I knew I was crazy in a sense. Things that had happened just didn't happen that way to a Normal Dutch-Swede-German-English from Minnesota. Way I see it now, things like that aren't still supposed to happen to anyone. So people saw that I was crazy and I guess wondered if I was ever going to be normal again.

We rode up to a Wuthering Heights dilemma of massive brick structures that tried to speak out and say "space" but the walls fought back and lead only to "capture". There were about 12 two story buildings in a circle with a large block sized lot of grass (or snow when it was winter) in the middle. There was one main building at the further end. The institution was built as a WPA Project during the Depression in the '30's and seemed to have the flair of a Mission House Community Project. I knew it was time to either cry or wish I had died after all when I saw this place. It's the kind of way you think of your house when it has too much dust and cobwebs. It certainly reminds you of some sort of Medieval village that tortures witches and nuns alike just because they are women. It's the kind of place Hollywood sends all people to be tortured as I recall in Frankenstein movies. It is something you never want to tell people where you have been and put off writing about for twenty years. It really did exist and is called Anoka State Hospital, in Anoka, Minnesota, Halloween Capitol of the World. I was told by a nurse in the hospital that I could never write about the place because I would be sued. She must have known what I had to write wasn't a travel brochure to the place, but an Edgar Allen Poe replacation of "The Pit and The Pendulum". However, names are not going down, partly because I forget them. The ones I do remember I would never repeat anyway because it would be like calling out for the Devil to visit you on a stormy night and you are all alone. That is partly why writing down all this is also hard. I just don't want to remember it. That is why I will write just a little at a time. Sort of like having only one cigarette every hour if I want to quit smoking. It will either ooze it out of my brain slowly, or it will drive me insane over a longer period of time.

The matron that escorted me to the building in back to the end of the encircled fortress said I was lucky it was one of the newer buildings. She took me down the long hall as if it were a whale's mouth. We came to a door which the upper half was a window. Sure enough I was being met by someone to open the door with a chain around her neck that dangled poker chips and in back of her was another long narrow hall of women wandering about helmlessly, or without control. I felt this door and the girl unlocking the door were the tonsils to this

tremendous whale. I knew if I walked in I would suffer, and I knew I had no choice. What I didn't know was that girl would be the first to leave after I had been there about a month. What I didn't know was that I would be the next to leave in about four months. I am trying to mentally enter that place again so that I can write about it. It is hard. It is something I do not want to do. I can think about the leaving easier. The arrival was like walking into Hell and not with the thought of being able to leave. Yet I knew as I entered that stenchy stable of the insane, I would have to leave with every prayer I could remember to say to get out again. It was not like the country club camp resort I had just come from complete with swimming pool, air conditioning, beauty shop, and lovely lake to walk along. That was where I was sent after my first suicide attempt and that was where I guess the government decided they could not allow me to stay because they were not going to pay for me to be luxuriously insane, but they could dump me here instead. I went to the other place at first for some reason instead of here. I guess that was for observation before the kangaroo court could judge me at a hearing and confirm me some label and then switch me over to where they take people who would rather be dead and dump them there to fight for their life or die away from all civilization. I've heard stories about people dying, going through a tunnel, reaching the light. No one I know talks much about dying, going through the tunnel, into doom. It might be because it is so hard to talk about and writing makes it seem much more permanent.

The bowels and belly of the whale was the Day Room. It slept 35 to 40 beds. All of them looked as if they had been raped by monsters and left here. The floor had a pool of urine on the gray linoleum. The boss nurse came out of her cage to welcome me to hell and tell me what the rules were and that if I followed them I would be all right. I asked her why some of the women had leather bands around their wrists and sometimes their ankles as I looked at the beds. She said they had violent tendencies, that it happens to anyone to shows any kind of violence. I asked her why some women were in rooms by themselves. These rooms were called seclusion rooms. They were violent too. I asked her what was the difference in the leather bands violence and the seclusion room violence. I don't

know now what the answer was. I think though after they run out of rooms, they use the leather bands. Something like that.

The Miller Ward, where I was stationed, the boss nurse told me, had an economic system. It was the "Chip System". Later, I figured out why I never saw a janitor on Miller Ward. It was because the Chip System was a reward and pay system of poker chips. Doing different tasks, from emptying bedpans to mopping floors and walls rewarded various amounts of poker chips. After a total of 10,000 chips, you could pay to be discharged. This was some kind of behavior therapy. The whole time I was on Miller Ward I never talked about my dad dying in a grocery store robbery, the tailhooking, the drugs I was put on in San Francisco. It cost chips to talk to the psychiatrist. I went once I remember as an interview, and then I didn't have to pay. The shrink was such a jerk, I didn't want to see him again. Once a week or something he met with us in a group in a smaller day room, we called the t.v. room, but no one really watched the television. There was nothing to talk to him about in there. Like I say, he was a total jerk. He was the one who thought up this chip system and was writing a research paper on how it worked. We were nothing but guinea pigs for his thesis in college. Everytime we asked about a problem, he'd say, "What do you think?", and call that therapy. One time he got so upset he threw a bottle of pills in his suitcoat pocket across the room and yelled something stupid.

Anyway, I'm sitting here, in my memory, in the big dayroom where women are shouting stuff and where I learned to swear. This boss nurse is playing some maternal big sister role in telling me the rules and then points over to the pool of urine and says I can get 10 chips for mopping it up and then shows me the mop. I could have been the Boston Strangler or someone who had just been abused in my home. She's showing me a mop to slop up urine for 10 lousy chips. It was there and then I knew I had no other story to tell except that for four months I worked very hard to get discharged. Therapy had to wait. Maybe after I got therapy for having been here in the first place.

Three. First Night

That first night I slept in Anoka, the only thing I seem to forget is how many chips I earned that day. Maybe I should have kept an accounting book I sometimes think. You know, like assets, liabilities, expenses. That's what chips were all about there. Even candy costs chips. I have the number 180 in my head all the time. Somehow that seems to high. Maybe it was about that though. I sure enough mopped up enough urine. The woman sleeping next to my bed kept me busy all night emptying her bed pan. She wasn't too sick or anything to go to the bathroom. She was in restraints though and couldn't leave the bed, so she squatted down over her bedpan when she had a bowel movement and she had a lot of them. They told me she was the most dangerous one on the ward. I don't understand why. She didn't smoke, so she wouldn't bother me for cigarettes. She hardly even talked to anyone. Besides, she was able to fill up that bedpan enough times to keep up my income of chips my first day there before I knew what I was doing. She was nice to me because I would empty her bedpan with no questions.

I wasn't so sure of some of the other women on the ward. They are hard for me to describe, but so easy for my memory to picture. Why can't it come out in words? The other bed at the head of my bed, was really who scared me, but she was in restraints too. It was sort of the way she talked all day back and forth to some of the others. I can't quite remember it very well. She liked to threaten others and said she was missing her finger from having had it bitten off by another woman at the other end of the day room. That other woman was built sort of the same as her. They both seemed about six feet, manish, boystrous, teeth missing, large legs of muscle, of course both four-point restraints (arms and legs). Anyway, the woman at the other end of the room said that she bit off her finger because she had bit off her thumb. I sort of had the idea you don't mess with these people. But the woman at the head of my bed was nice to tell me how to hide my cigarettes in my pillow so no one would steal them. She also told me I could use an old slipper I had as an ash tray. Things like that. It seemed she was watching out for me also by telling me about all the other

women in the ward as to who to watch out for and why. I didn't empty her bedpan, that was another patient's territory for her chips. We all had an understanding that way.

Wolf woman, the one who kept using the bedpan by my bed, didn't talk or seem violent that night. I just could not figure out why she needed those restraints. Then it dawned on me. She started to say some things that didn't seem normal or nice. She didn't say them to me. She was referring to someone else, but I don't know who. Maybe just talking to herself. But she sure seemed mad or angry.

It was hard trying to get any sleep. The Day Room where we all slept had windows from outside all along the wall. It was so creepy with the dark sky floating into this sea of women who didn't make any sense by that time of night. From my pillow I looked toward another wall with windows out into the hall, where lights were out because it was after whatever lights out time was and I think that was nine o'clock, but most of us really didn't get quiet until ten. There was an observation deck with its lights on all night, or the nurses office. That is what I kept looking at until I finally got some kind of sleep. There was one patient who kept walking up and down the hall, then finally into the observation deck. Later, I knew she does that every night. She just liked to talk to that nurse at night, and they sat at the desk and chatted until real late all the time. I liked that patient. I couldn't figure her to be a mental, I don't think you would either. She was just a good sport about everything to everybody. I might not talk about her again, because I never really recall much about her. She had a song she'd always sing up and down the halls, or at least sometimes. She was singing it that night. I couldn't help but like her for it too. "Oh I wish I were an Oscar Meyer Wiener, That is what I'd really like to be. 'Cause if I were an Oscar Meyer Wiener, Everyone would be in love with me." She was right on the money with that one.

Well, Wolf Woman Who Scares No One finally went to sleep. I knew I didn't have to do anymore bedpans. The one at the head of my bed finally ran out of advice to me on how to survive my first night in the place. Maybe I should say my prayers. I figured the observation deck was going to have its light on all night, and looking at them was not going to make that light turn off. I was always the last one to try to sleep at home because I

snored so loud. I never thought I'd be in a place like this, and that my snoring might even lead me to a seclusion room. I had to be careful and try to make sure all the women were asleep.

Then it happened. I heard Mom from down the hall calling out "Susie, Susie, Susie". My God, what was Mom doing here, especially after lights out. It sort of felt good, but it startled me too. I didn't know whether to get out of bed or what. Then, that was all I heard. I didn't see her going to the observation deck. What the Hell? I was convinced. I am crazy. I'm hearing voices. With that I stopped questioning why I was there and so forth, content with the fact that maybe this is where I belonged. Later, Mom said that it was about the same time of night that I heard her calling to me that she was praying helplessly to God to be beside me while I fought this new fight. Who knows. Maybe when sometimes we hear a voice like that, it could be just someone who really cares praying for us.

Four. The Chip System

It doesn't follow in any logic what happened now. Days melted together. Coming and going. All of it happened. The second day could have been the last day. There really wasn't any last day afterall I think though. To this day I feel like I'm still earning chips, still paying chips, still sleeping and the observation deck is watching, still seeing strange people walking up and down halls.

I EARNED chips. It was sort of like being promoted to jobs. I mopped floors, washed door handles, cleaned toilets, cleaned bedpans. I paid to go swimming, go to church (or did they pay me?), paid to go to the cafeteria, paid for candy, washed seclusion room walls that were graffitied, I was even trusted to be doorkeeper. That's funny, I just remembered one girl coming into the small dayroom obviously angry at the psychiatrist (the jerk, remember?). She hadn't been there before as far as I knew. She slapped her chart down on the psychiatrist's lap and seemed really steamed, but not violent. She said something like, "Just can't keep away from this place." I found out one day she had been doorkeeper and she just walked off the hospital grounds and went to join her friends. Her friends were the Hell's Angels, and she liked them and trusted them better than

any nicer type friends. They protected her real nice, and her other type of friends were her father's type who was a congressman or something. She and I got together later and we tried to write about this place, we knew the story had to get out. I've been waiting to see if she would write it instead of me, but I haven't seen anything around. So I guess I have to try and tell you.

I liked earning chips. I would wash the floor, babysit a woman who was allowed to temporarily be out of seclusion, and be doorkeeper all at one time. I also would not go eat at the cafeteria, and eat in the hall on the floor instead. Why pay chips for this food? I liked swimming though. I really liked the life guard. She taught me how to do the half pike dive and it got me away from those crazy women. I got to thinking maybe I could earn chips away from Miller Ward if I worked it right. So I got chips by developing a theory with the doctor that I could do a thing I called "work therapy". What I was doing before was the same idea, but I told doc I had to get off the ward, but I hated paying for it. So, he started me mopping floors for the kitchen that served people who had to be confined to Miller Ward. This other girl and I had a blast getting away from Miller to do that. It was a big floor. This other girl came in after me, and she wasn't crazy either. She was just a preacher's kid, not doing what p.k.'s were supposed to do, but doing what they end up doing. We'd mop and sing at the same time. It was perfect to sing in the kitchen. It had sort of an echo effect, and no one was around.

Then I got a job as a nurses aid. First, I worked with another girl in the geriatric ward. It sort of bored me. The other girl was there because she was the ward of the state waiting for a foster home, she wasn't crazy either. She borrowed cigarettes from the rest of us because she was too young to smoke. She had a happiness about her all the time. You can like that when you are stuck like glue to these walls. She was really nice to those old people. I asked where I could do nurses aid work instead. They put me on the surgery ward. That was a lot more fun for me. The nurses working there would let me have coffee and smoke whenever I wanted, and they would tell me about the parties they were having and their hangovers. The surgery patients were usually guys I could talk with, and it was

nice being able to talk to a man for a change.

Then came the real promotion. I got a job working as a typist for a man in some kind of office. He didn't have a desk for me, but I found a cardboard box I could put the typewriter on that was tall enough for my chair. We listened to WCCO and he talked to me about what was going on in Minneapolis. He was a nice man, and he didn't show to me that he thought I was sick. I did a lot of these jobs within the week, or maybe sometimes all in the same day. This was fun. I was not upset with the fact I didn't get paid really. I was getting those chips. I was getting off the ward. I didn't have to pay anyone. I was getting to be the richest one on the ward. Some girls didn't like me for it. Some others tried to get to do what I was doing. Maybe they got started with it, but then got crazy or something where they couldn't stay with it.

I liked going to occupational therapy too. I can't remember if I had to pay for it. It was fun doing paintings and pictures with gluing on stones. Wednesdays we cooked something in occupational therapy. It was nice to eat a good meal like that sometimes and know I made it. I went with another girl that got to be a good friend for awhile after I got out and we did sleep overs together now and then. She said she was a nymphomaniac, so it was a lot of fun listening to her explain how she did what she did, until she got married. Then she was boring, fussy and bossy. Maybe she should have stayed a single.

I'd go to the cafeteria now and then and mostly all the time after I started getting a really good income of chips. We had a group at a table that got to be a clique. It felt good to stand in a line and choose what I wanted, to sit at a table, especially with friends. After awhile it got to be a status thing. Sort of like belonging to the country club, and being rich enough to belong. We had a kind of humor I've been sort of using all the way through here, and it may or may not strike you funny. Anyway, it's sort of like the humor with the guy at the table that would sit with us. He'd shake his leg now and then and tell the dog down there that he didn't like serving him scraps from the table and warn him to stop begging. Of course there wasn't a dog. Then he would talk about his amnesia and make jokes that he could escape from the hospital, and then use his escape and amnesia if he got caught by saying he never remembered a thing

amnesia if he got caught by saying he never remembered a thing about being in the hospital. It's not much to talk about, but just trying to say we had fun in spite of ourselves. Later, I found out I could use the same chips for the cafeteria and then go to the coffee shop too. There we would get high on Dicks inhalers by breaking open the inhaler and drink coffee too at the same time. I wrote a lot of poems from that stuff, but really doubt they were any good. My roommate said that was one of the worst things we could have ever done. But we were so snowed on tranquilizers and so schizophrenic we probably never noticed. Besides we knew that the cafeteria had salt peter in the coffee, but the coffee shop didn't. Or at least the guy who had the dog biting at his leg in the cafeteria as a joke said he figured that out because the coffee shop was for the public, whereas the cafeteria was for the patients. He was our leader, and we would believe whatever he said.

Which reminds me of another thing to mention. Remember I said the hospital had all these two floor buildings in a circle? Well, the buildings were called cottages. All these cottages and the big main building were connected beneath the ground with a tunnel in full circle. You could see human feces and other stuff sometimes in the tunnel. The tunnel had an underground type life too. That was where the coffee shop, beauty shop, and laundromat were. It was also a great place to make out. You saw some of that too. This one guy there and I would pass some time that way. Nothing bad about it. You just had to get your mind away from being locked in now and then, and that was sort of one of the ways. We called it make out therapy. It didn't cost any chips either. But you had to be careful. That nymphomaniac I mentioned earlier was caught making out inside an elevator with the amnesiac mentioned earlier that knew about the salt peter. The white coats grounded her to the Miller Ward after that for about a month and put her on birth control pills just in case. So I was pretty careful. I wasn't earning these chips for fun. I had to get out of here. Oh yes, that was another song we liked. "We Gotta Get Out of This Place"...remember that one?

Well, I made such an effort at earning chips and was making this a pretty sophisticated economy to the point that the white coats had to make some changes. They went from the

red, white, and blue poker chips to small tin colored chips that were lighter weight and increasing various denominations. They even had the lavender blue chip...the 10,000 value chip. This was getting to be a real economic system. They had to change because I had too many chips around my neck, and others were catching on from me on how to make this system work. You couldn't really leave these chips laying around or someone would steal them. They changed the Monday after I did a finger painting in occupational therapy of poker chips on a green gambling table. The psychiatrist wanted to keep the finger painting. It just occurred to me I should have made him give me chips for it.

The biggest expense I made with my chips was a real sacrifice, but necessary. There were private rooms down the hall from the large Day Room. They weren't really private, they slept two in a room. There were about seven of these rooms. If my recall is good, it cost about 300 chips a month. I had to get one. I knew the women on the ward in the Day Room were going to drive me crazy if I didn't get one of these rooms. So one time I got a room with the nymphomaniac. We stayed up all night talking about the stuff she knew in her experiences. I got sort of tired of that. Then I got another room with someone really cool. She was in a wheelchair from jumping from the Hennepin Bridge trying to get away from her pimp. She had a degree from the University as a social worker. She couldn't really work for chips. But she had a different thing going. She used a Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket and put all her cigarette butts in it. Then she would sell her cigarette butts for chips. If they needed a light, she would ask for more chips. Pretty smart cookie. We had good talks too. Now I was able to get the record player from home, and people came to our room a lot and we had good times. The best one I can remember was when we went on a binge with the p.k. in the room next door hanging up male photos all over our walls. Nothing wrong with us.

Five. Visitors

Anoka State Hospital wasn't really a place where you got many visitors or expected any visitors at all. Most of the girls in the Miller Ward never had anyone come to see them. Maybe it

was because the winter in Minnesota was pretty bad that year and the roads leading into Anoka were rough. At least would-be visitors could always use that as an excuse.

As I recall, that doorkeeper I first met when I came only had her husband visiting once in awhile. I never really knew her very well, but she was quiet and serene. The last day of her stay there, she had a ventriloquist dummy. Her husband brought it to her and she gave a ventriloquist act for us before she left.

My roommate with the Kentucky Fried Chicken Bucket was the only other person I recall that had any visitor. Her visitor might not have been really the friendship type though. She came as a social worker and talked with her on whatever social workers got to talk about.

Not only being the richest with chips in Miller Ward, I was the one who had the most visits. Every Sunday Mom would come. God almighty, I don't know what I would have done without her Sunday visits. At first I was not supposed to leave the hospital grounds. So I paid some chips and we would go down to the coffee house in the tunnel together. But Mom was such a nice person, I didn't take her through the tunnel if I recall. I sure hope I didn't. We would sit and have coffee, ice cream, whatever. I would show her my poems. I accidentally swore a lot because I was getting so used to it. In a way I think she liked me telling her the stories about each week. I hope they were not things she did not like to hear, and thought I was getting better and feeling okay. I tried to keep it that way.

Because the other girls didn't get any visitors, Mom sort of became the Official Visitor on Miller Ward, if not everyone's Mom who needed that. I'd start bringing a friend along with me now and then to the coffee shop with us. Mom says she didn't go to the coffee shop but we went to a hamburger shop with them, so maybe that didn't really happen. Memories sometimes are hard to retrieve. We all seemed to have a good time talking about how crummy the system was with the hospital, and still laugh through it all.

Then, if I remember right, and it wasn't another time I had to go back to Anoka under the Merit System and in a cottage instead of Miller Ward to get therapy from being on Miller Ward, I think Mom would take me out to McDonalds. I know she did

that when I was in the cottage, I'm just not clear if I was really allowed off the grounds while in Miller. Maybe after I had been there for a month or two we went to McDonalds.

I do remember McDonalds as being a big event in my life each week. They had strawberry shortcake with huge strawberries on a picture describing the dessert. It always drove me to needing to order some. Of course, the strawberries didn't really look that way in real life, but I was getting used to pretending food was any good at all. Besides, I always had a craving for strawberries, so they were the best ever.

Mom was real good with me in talking about spiritual things. She should have been a minister. Or, in her case, a Christian Science Practitioner since she's a Scientist. She really gave me things to learn how to deal and cope with all the situations I've ever been in with my life that again were always so difficult.

I like the one where she says, "Demons are the cobwebs in your Mind, and Angels come and sweep away the cobwebs with their wings." She also has me believing that there really is no death, and later in my life I have given that a lot of study and understand some truth to that. She seems to be the one I should pray to, but that doesn't seem feasible. You can pray to saints, can't you?

Dr. Rouner, my Congregational minister later and previously acted in his part for all our family's funerals and weddings, crisis' and talk-it-over stuff was pretty much a saint himself. It's hard to explain this man. Especially for me. But I do know he took special interest in my family and every Sunday when I was at I church I could see him looking right at me telling me Satan had control over my life and I would have to repent. I told him that once, and he said he never even thought to say or do that. Anyway, he came during a worst-type blizzard Minneapolis was having in a little red car that would never make it through just to see me because I called him on the phone and told him I couldn't make it anymore. I felt so damn guilty that he had done that, that after he got there I could hardly talk to him that night.

Paul, my oldest brother, said he came to see me. I don't recall that. If anything, I recall calling him on the pay phone out by the kitchen we mopped and begged him to come out to see

me. Maybe he did. It is really funny I don't remember him coming. If he did, I'm sure I was proud to show him off because he was so darn handsome and such a gentleman.

Somewhere toward the end of my stay, I remember I could actually go to Minneapolis on the bus to be home on weekends. Then Mom and my youngest brother Rick went out to eat at Diking Village where you could eat as much as you wanted for a small price. That's when I taught Rick how to swear. I hoped he learned well. He's been missing for twenty years and may need to know how.

The best visitor I know of is the one who comes. It's so important to get that company when you are in a shelter-type place like this. I keep thinking the only reason I made it through was because I had visitors. Now I don't care much about having company because I think they feel they have to see me. But I still have to have company or visitors. Guess we're sort of all the same.

Six. Miller Women

Each time I remember the women in Miller Ward, I remember them as if they were a part of me, and it is hard for me to tell stories about these women as if one would talk about a friend in high school. There were memories, not completely able to remember to words.

One of the oldest women on the ward never really was aware you were there. She didn't know how to talk straight communication. She sort of spoke in rhymes and riddles. Some said she was born in the hospital. She was about 65 when I met her. She would draw and write illegible words all over her walls in seclusion. I would go in and wash them off. I liked her. It was so lonely that first night on Miller Ward. She yelled all sorts of profanity, riddles, and rhymes all into the night and kept any kind of silence from scaring me.

Another one in a seclusion room was in and out of seclusion. She didn't really belong in either world. I got her to get the hang of earning chips while she was in seclusion. While I was doorkeeper, she would be allowed out of seclusion if I watched her. She and I would then clean the day rooms and then we could both earn chips. I got chips also for doorkeeping

and for watching her. I liked her because we were about the same age and both knew what it was like to have epilepsy. We both also knew we weren't crazy. I just didn't allow this system to get me violent. She just got really angry sometimes about it and ended up in seclusion. After about a month of that though, I think she caught on to join them instead of fight them.

The seclusion rooms were about 6'x10'. They had a bed, a window with bars, and a bedpan, and the door had a small window in it also. I can't remember how many seclusion rooms there were. Maybe three, and five at the most. Sometimes I would shudder walking past them on my way out the door to the outside hall. Those rooms were always occupied, and they always scared me that maybe someday I would be put in one of them. They scared me more than the restraints. Because sometimes some of the women that ended up in them never got out of them again as far as I know.

There was one young woman in the seclusion room the whole time I was there. I never knew much about her. That one was violent, and she did not make any sense to me. There was another seclusion room way down at the other end of the hall that we were told was large and had rooms in it. There was supposed to be a woman in there no one was supposed to visit who was extremely violent, and there were many rumors about her. One of them was that the doctor was the only one who could go in there. Another rumor was that she got pregnant while being in that room. I can't dare say anything about that room. It still is an unknown rumor, like a town's alleged haunted house.

Sometimes I think those seclusion rooms were more dangerous to any ones psyche than of any help. The women in that ward though did become very violent at moments. It would be like a wild animal fight with the nurses, and white coats from the Miller Men's Ward were called onto the ward when a woman got vicious. I don't know why it doesn't seem quite that way anymore, excepting medications must pull that away from the brain. During the time I was there, they were doing lobotomies on the terribly violent still. That is something that really doesn't go on anymore either.

A few years ago I went to a ward for a couple of weeks in a different hospital and found out it was now illegal to keep

people in a seclusion room past a very short period of time. Time changes medicine, and medicine improves. I only needed to explain these seclusion rooms may not really be much in existence as I remembered them only to rid that fear if someone did need hospitalization, or at least understand that those days are over. What isn't over is the nightmares I sometimes get of them.

The large Day Room had some permanent residents that did not work or want to pay for the private rooms. The center of all the beds in the Day Room was perhaps the most interesting personality of anyone on Miller Ward altogether in my memory.

Out of a need for any type of data privacy, I must keep her identity to a minimum. She was beautiful, a popular high school graduate, and had a lovely singing voice. She woke up all of us in the morning singing to the rock n'roll station, and every rockin' song she sang so beautifully was not for that man she wanted, but for Jesus. She was many years ahead of her time in understanding of Christian rock. She idolized Christ if that is correct to say. She had her prayer book with her always along with the rosary around her neck. I cannot recall why I remember her being in restraints at times. I cannot believe she could have become violent. I do remember the times that she was in restraints she was able to get out of them with her bobby pins. I think I can remember why I like to remember her now. She was a constant reminder to me that none of this stuff meant anything at all. As she had no need to earn chips, no need to get off the ward, no need to show up in any therapy groups, she showed a tremendous need to be close to the Lord. That kind of faith was so real, and that faith made it real enough for me to realize I had no need to be afraid and kept God and my prayers with me at all times.

Another woman who came upon the ward I believe never needed Miller Ward either. It was as if she were writing a book about the place. I used to love to listen to the latest story she would be ready to write. That was the one who was supposed to write this book because I know she could have done a much better job at it than I can. She was the one whose friends were the Hell's Angels and maybe wrote about that instead.

There were a lot of troubled women on Miller Ward Day Room. I think that is why the observation deck looked right into

that room day and night. After I got a private room, I really tried to spend as little time in that room as possible.

I guess the private rooms made living on Miller easier. It made it easier to work for chips, it made it easier to sleep, it made it easier to have a friend of sorts. Those rooms should have been for everyone.

Seven. Miller Ward Nurses

The nurses on Miller Ward were the reason all of us were there. They were the reason why we earned chips. They were the reason why we took showers in that horrible shower room. They were the reason why we were careful before we said anything to them, or why we became overwhelmingly violent toward them. They were our way out of Miller Ward. They were even the reason why I have avoided talking or writing about the place for all these years.

The boss nurse, or Director, was the nice one. I can't use names I know. I guess that means I can't use descriptions either. But she was like a role model to me, and I wanted so hard to please her. She didn't come across as an over-intelligent college graduate. She didn't show herself as someone you had to be careful around. But you still didn't want to tell her the place was the pits. You didn't want to tell her because maybe she would figure it out and quit. You didn't want that one to quit, she was one of the nice ones, and you needed her there. I can't recall if she had a sense of humor, so much as she had a kind of empathy and knew what could motivate each and every one of us. It was like that first day I was there she knew all the talking in the world wasn't going to do me any good. She knew I had to work my hardest and get out of there. It was like the time she knew my roommate could get out of her wheelchair and walk, and one day she dared her to do it by offering her chips to do it first. My roommate didn't fall for that. But when she dared her somehow, or coaxed her into it, there she was standing and walking a couple of steps. She was the one who ran the whole show of Miller Ward and was the cleanest and kindest to all of us. I liked her if you haven't figured that out yet.

Then there was a sweet friend of a nurse I'll never forget.

We used to stay up all night and play Canasta into late late hours. She would tell me the way it was with people in Anoka, what her job at McDonalds was like, what her boyfriend was like and how she liked to race cars. She was so cool and the best friend I could have had in Miller.

There was one nurse you either loved or you hated. And to this day, I think the ones who seemed to love her and cotton up to her were just plain afraid of her. She was one person that hated the job, hated the ward, hated the girls, hated life maybe. I guess we all have those days. I just can't be that critical to her now. Somehow I remember though she was just one of those people who could really get her jollies off of putting people in restraints, and sometimes I think she drove people to being in restraints. She would say that the patients on Miller were "nothing but animals", but she never really saw herself as a lion tamer or dog beater.

The fun nurses were the nursing students that came every quarter of school. I would pal up with a couple of them each time. We would plan parties like St. Patrick's party when we would do the small day room into green shamrocks, have a green cake, and green punch. Same sort of thing for Valentine's day. I would go to breakfast with some of them after awhile instead of sitting with the clique and talk to them about my nurses aide job and about what nursing school was like. They were more real to me than the nurses at the observation deck. We would talk about other things of course, but the most interesting I guess was we would talk at all and not feel analyzed.

There must of been other nurses, just don't remember them very well. I can't remember if one woman I recall was a nurse, or some sort of physical therapist or one of those specialized things. I liked her a lot. She always had us doing excercises or talk of fun things. She was an older woman, probably at that time, yet maybe younger than I am now. She wasn't a person you had to worry about anything while around her.

There was another woman that was sort of like everyone's Aunt Bee. She made you feel like you were back home. Because her life was rough in some ways, you knew you might not really have anything wrong about yourself afterall. She was sort of neat one time that I will never forget. I remember escaping

from Anoka and really risked being put in seclusion because of it. But I really had to have some pickled herring so I made my way to a small grocery store to buy some. My roommate also had a strong craving for pickled pigs feet so I picked that up too. I bravely came back and was surprised no one knew I was even gone. This nurse was amused that I had gone shopping at such a risk just for that purpose and offered the employee refrigerator for me to store the jars and promised she wouldn't tell anyone what I did.

I know some books write up these nurses as bearing some sort of torch and that might be why they work in a place like that. My feeling was they were real people that cared a real lot, and a special type of caring lead them to help out when psychiatry was in a very shabby stage of knowing what it was doing.

At the same time, it was rough having these nurses in our life at all. We were always being watched by them and always having notes written up about any observations. We always had to take those pills that snowed us, and sometimes they even could tell we weren't always swallowing the pills, or sometimes they even knew we were storing sleeping pills instead of actually taking them. They knew everything. Sometimes to this day I feel there are people like that at work or in my life that know every move I make. In other words, if I wasn't paranoid before I went into the hospital, those nurses were sure to make me paranoid. I never want a job like that because I never want to do that to anyone. Years later I did work as a nurses aid, and even went to nursing school though, but was always afraid of being that kind of person to the patients.

Eight. There Needed to be a Change

Sitting in the hallway one day having lunch and saving chips by not going to the cafeteria, I was talking with my friend who was supposed to write this story, maybe she did. We were perplexed. Almost everyone on the ward was in seclusion or in restraints in the large Day Room. We figured there were only about five to eight of us among about 40 woman who were not in restraints or in seclusion. I was asking her to write about it someday when she got the bright idea to call the Star and

Tribune Newspaper to come to the hospital. We both knew something had to be done about it soon, otherwise we might be the next in restraints.

The Tribune Sunday Paper made arrangements and came to the hospital with photographers and reporters. I guess the nursing staff thought this was an opportune time to show their beautiful facilities. I remember doing my hair up special and I was in one of the photographs with some other girls looking into the glassed observation deck at the candy display. We had the floors washed and waxed very special and everyone dressed in their most decent best. But my girlfriend and I knew nothing would really change the atmosphere.

Flashbulbs were popping left and right. I recall the boss nurse showing the photographers some shabby print of a picture in the large Day Room as being something to decorate that terrible room. Either that, or take attention away from all the women in restraints in the beds and chairs. The photographers, thank God, knew where to aim. The reporters acted as if they were writing up the latest model at the Mao Clinic. The article came out a lot differently.

It made head lines. Sunday paper headlines. It showed a woman starved and alone in a seclusion room, with wording of how long, about six months, she had been in there completely isolated. It had a picture of wolf woman's, the one who I first was emptying bed pans for, of inflamed swollen wrists and ankles that had become gangrenous from being in restraints for three months so that she had to also take penicillin along with her other medications. It showed a picture of the pregnant woman in isolation that was not pregnant before she got in the hospital and the only person allowed to see her was the doctor. It showed all the restrained women all over the ward.

It showed enough that the head doctor resigned. It saw enough of what the patients had to report that one of the nurses had to resign, the one that said we were animals and had that written on memo. It showed enough that a report also came out of one of the patients who drowned in the river by the hospital with laundry bags filled with bricks.

It wasn't the kind of thing people enjoy reading on a Sunday morning back in those days. It was the kind of thing that to this day I know I am leaving out some things, and the

things I say I still am not sure I believe. But I know I lived it.

Later and sometimes now I still hear stories that sound the same of jail systems, prison systems, and similar hospital systems. These are the toilet systems of society. These are the systems that people on the street panhandling and living in cardboard houses are avoiding. The hospital systems that are nice and fancy and resorts dodge us from realizing that these other places exist. Maybe it doesn't matter. Until you live in it.

I don't know if it makes any difference that the paper published what it did. I became somewhat active on the Patient's Bill of Rights which was started after that article. I hope some changes I helped make made a difference. While I was on Miller Ward it was much too soon for some of these changes to be seen. I had to return of course to Anoka after being discharged for more treatment. It was obvious I did not get treatment that first time around. The changes were dynamic. And that Miller Ward for women and the Chip System no longer existed when I returned. I have just one more story to tell. It is my favorite one. I have been wanting to tell it. I hope you will read it. It is the next and last story, and most incredible.

Nine. Last Day

It was time to leave. I had the lavender-blue chip. 10,000. It had been four months. It was Good Friday the doctor said I could leave. I knew it was something I couldn't do fast enough. It was something I knew I had to savor. Easter was Sunday. I would leave Easter I told him.

I made up little drawings of bunnies and chickens and Sunday morning they were taped on all the beds. I had green paper grass and jelly beans at each of the beds. I was going to have Easter on Miller Ward. I told God I wanted to see a Miracle.

When the sun rose that morning I turned on my record player to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's Handel's MESSIAH. I was in a private room all the way to the end of Miller Ward. I had to play it full volume for the Day Room to hear the music. It sounded so grand to me.

I went to each bed. I said, "He is Risen". I told them it was Easter, and that on Easter, they were to reply "He is Risen Indeed". Many of the patients played along with my jubilation

and were happy to have some Easter in their life.

There was one patient that wore a football helmet in the Day Room because she would bite her skin off and would not eat her meals fed to her by a patient, the nymphomaniac. That day she was eating food. That day she no longer needed the football helmet. I remember seeing her some years later. I didn't know she ever knew me in her time at the hospital. She recognized me while she was waitressing and she looked in perfect health and happy.

There was another patient that day who was some kind of slow learner or mentally retarded. She was trying to read the Bible that morning and went to church a little later that morning. Everyone who was allowed off the ward to go to the hospital's church service that day was lining up to go to service. Easter does draw a crowd they say, but something unusually joyful and real was happening this time.

Another patient was out of restraints. By the time I left that day, most the women were not in restraints and were released from them that day.

Later in my life, my roommate who was bound to a wheelchair and I met at the same place where I worked. She was walking and a very productive worker. We knew each other right away, but no one else knew from where or how, and we would never tell anyone.

When I returned to Anoka for further therapy, the woman who was at the head of my bed, and the woman from the other end that was yelling back and forth to her were wearing dresses and walking the grounds freely.

Most the seclusion rooms were opened that day, and the woman were free from the isolation forever. A couple of these patients later got married. I did too, but did not stay married after nearly a twenty year marriage. I'm busy most the time, try to stay positive, and remember that Easter Day that seemed like a miracle all the time. I wonder how many chips I should have got for asking God for that healing. At least, I wonder how many chips I should get for writing you this. Sure, I left out about 20 more years in my life, and you probably wonder what happened to them.

Well, we survived. HALLELUJAH!