

First Schizophrenia

A true story by Jeffrey LaPointe

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by Jeffrey LaPointe

Twenty-three, my life just begun. Yet, ended. It was the mid-nineties. I had returned to the U.S. a few months before from Germany. There, I had done my final college term. Within a couple of months of my return I turned all of the Earth against myself.

That is, I believed I had. But I would recover. And survive my turmoil.

I never believed I would survive when I descended the steps further into the psychiatric hospital. The previous evening the hospital's doctors and nurses had evaluated me upstairs. They forced me to stay. Why had I needed evaluation? My parents had convinced me to go in it for it. Because of my paranoid suspicion and distrust at home. And because of my dejection. Later, I would realize, the evaluation had saved me.

Behind me, when I'd gotten down the steps, the door must have locked. For, as I would learn later, when it opened and closed, it always locked. I would also soon believe that the hospital would keep me prisoner. For life. As my parents had secretly wanted. As all people everywhere had wanted.

And because the world did hate me, never would I work again. Never strive for any goals. Never write essays or books. Never master a language. Never study the Stuarts or the Civil War in England. Never live.

At the front desk I asked a white, dark-and long-haired female nurse:

-- How long will I be here for?

The nurse told me:

-- Once you're in here, you *can't get out*.

Only later would I realize, even while she spoke, the nurse's mouth had hung wide open. I would wonder: Had the nurse really hit me with that news? Or had my mind fooled me? Or, knowing I could read her mind, had the nurse talked to me "silently" in her head? Now, of course, I know the answers.

In the meantime, in the patients' living area, I knew:

It. Was. True.

My life. Over.

The hospital. The city. Earth. The people. Everywhere. They all suffocated. Me. I could not. Never would. Be able. To breathe. Live. Small. Shrunken. My world. Forever. Decades.

A recent memory. Not one I'd then recalled. One of the many of my life's scenes that throughout my ordeal I pondered and repondered. Since my ordeal had started months before.

Of one of the nurses upstairs, a blonde woman. From an office and behind a window-shaped opening there, she asked:

-- Do you know what you've been diagnosed with? No?

I didn't know. So she told me.:

-- Schizzzzzzzz -o -phre -ni -a.

A horrible word. Its meaning: I had died. Though I was still living.

Shock.

Soon, my thoughts spun free, and over the Earth. And they would spin around and around like that throughout my hospital stay almost without pause. Without letting up. Around and around, my ideas would spin. And race.

One early evening. Soon after I'd entered the hospital. In my sparsely furnished bedroom, with little other than two beds, one for me and the other for my then-absent roommate. As always, the doctors, nurses, social workers, and patients downstairs tormented me. They knew they were tormenting me. Because with my weirdly acute hearing, I could hear their faint voices. As they ridiculed me, as they laughed about me, and even as they thought about me. All of this fueled my spinning, racing, and public thoughts. My thoughts in turn spurred the people below to stay angry, to keep talking about me. And this cycle, which I struggled against all day, every day, constantly, I knew would never end. How, really, could I escape it?

After a while that evening, one voice, a man's, faint yet distinct, stunned me:

-- We've all always known this would happen since a long ago.

So! Proof. Predestination. Since my birth over twenty years ago the world had known:

Jeffrey LaPointe would land in a psy-

chiatric hospital for life.

Before my discharge I would see, at last, my paranoia for what it was—paranoia. And realize that the hospital had helped me. Then, I had not yet realized that. I could see only that the endless cycles would last all of my life.

Another night. In bed. Outside of my door a steel portcullis crashed shut. *Clang!* Another.

They've imprisoned me! God. Why are they doing this?

Come morning, I expected, I would be sent to the insane asylum.

Such dark ideas, moment after moment, but long behind me now.

One afternoon. At the payphone in the dining area a strange white, dark-haired man approached me. He said:

-- I'm going to tell him what's going on.

And with a cigarette he pressed my bare arm.

I yelled:

-- Hey!

But I held onto the phone. The man wanted to take it and crash my talk with my father. I certainly was not going to let him.

The man looked at me and said:

-- Anyone who would hold onto a phone when hit with a hot cigarette butt . . .

Then, he declared:

-- When you get out of here, you're going to be a *bum*!

And he left. But I would see the strange man again.

So. A bum. That meant the hospital was indeed going to release me. But only after my parents, with whom I still lived having just finished college, moved, stranding me in the city. They'd been fooling me. Thus: Me, homeless. For the rest of my life. Predestination. Or, so I believed, despite an almost-life-long skepticism of fantastic ideas.

How could I, man like me, have believed in far-fetched and paranoid ideas? Believed that everybody could hear him? That his own family had conspired over his life to some day doom him? How?

Because of the evidence that had mounted over months.

One day, a woman with short hair ushered me to a hallway of offices on the ground floor. To a meeting room at the front of the hall. Just after she herself had walked into the room, ahead of me was the strange man. The man who had attacked me with the cigarette. He approached me again. Who knew what might happen? He might reveal the truth to everyone that I knew everything. Right there. Right then.

Instead, the man said:

-- Don't go in Jeff! Don't go in!

My thoughts stopped spinning. Outside of the room I wondered: If I go in, what will happen? Something bad? Should I go in? What will happen if I do?

As I pondered what to do, I realized at last: The strange man was just another patient. How he'd learned my name, I no longer know. At that time, though, I believed the entire world knew of me and likely knew my name.

-- Don't go in, Jeff! Don't go in!

The man hopped around and waved his arms back and forth as he spoke. As if he were tossing pieces of confusion around. Pieces meant for me.

At last, I ventured into the room. There, some hospital staff sat around a table, my social worker, my doctor, also, and, like my social worker, a man, but bearded and without glasses. The others were strangers to me. I was certainly no stranger to any of them—I was the man everybody could hear. So what more could they want from me, an already beaten-down man?

I seated myself. My doctor started the meeting.

-- Why didn't you come in right away when we asked you to, Mr. LaPointe?

I told him about the strange man's antics. The doctor sent one of the other staff to tend to the man, to scold him.

Soon my doctor looked at me again and raised one of his hands.

-- How many fingers do you see?

I lost focus before my doctor lowered his hand. I answered him with a wrong count.

And the doctor told me:

-- You're going to have to stay here a while. To recuperate. One of your symptoms is, you can't concentrate.

-- But I can! I can concentrate.

The doctor raised his hand and his fingers again, lowered them.

He repeated his question.

I guessed a number, again.

-- You obviously cannot.

The doctor went on:

-- Do you know why meeting with me is important?

I nodded.

-- Why?

I repeated what he'd told me in our first meeting:

-- Because you will determine when I'll get out of here.

My social worker looked from me to the doctor and back to me, bewildered.

My doctor dismissed me.

I walked out of the room. Would the hospital ever let go the man hated and vilified around Earth?

The answer: No.

Something else also bothered me. Something bigger than it seemed, about my doctor having told me he himself would decide when I would leave the hospital. What, though? And why the social worker's surprise? I just did not know. I never knew what was going on. Everybody else did. But I never knew. Or, did I just understand the confusion around me too well?

In any case, I certainly could not ask someone about my situation. That would give away for sure to everybody the truth—that I did really know everybody could hear me think and talk. This was the truth I struggled to hide and to never admit to anyone. Even though the world always heard my thoughts.

Over the past months I'd seen so much evidence suggesting that everyone could hear me. I'd seen it since my return to the U.S. I saw it in my stay in the hospital.

For example, I'd been telling myself, shortly after I'd entered the hospital: *I want another chance. Just one more chance.*

Soon after, my social worker found me for the first time in the patients' living area. He was a man with a foreign-sounding surname and two Master's degrees. In the small outside smoking area we'd moved to he suddenly, despite that I don't smoke, told me:

-- You can have another chance.

So I knew. Yes, the world *was* reading my mind. I never would really get another chance.

Another time, later, at night. At 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. From the hospital payphone I tried to call my parents. I needed to know: Were my parents going to move away? Worry drove me to find out. Despite the rule that prohibited phone calls by patients that late.

But a man came. White, tall and burly, and wearing long blond hair tied in a ponytail, he forbade me to use the phone. I tried to call my parents, anyway. And failed. The man did stop me. And an African-American man came to help him. Together, they grabbed me by my torso and by my legs and hoisted me into the air. Each man held me by one end.

-- Hey!

They started to carry me to the big stairway that led up to the patients' bedrooms. On the way, they stopped. A grey-haired female nurse met us and told me to take my meds. I told her, as I hung parallel to the floor and between the two men:

-- I've already taken them.

I heard the nurse answer in as sinister voice:

-- Yeah, well, you're going to take another one.

She smiled a smile that matched her voice. And she held to my mouth one of the hospital's white paper cups and a pill. By instinct I opened my mouth and let the nurse give me the pill and the water to swallow it with. And just after that the conspiracy struck me. I asked myself: Were the pills I'd been taking really just the medications Trilafon and Cogentin?

It's going to paralyze me!

Next, I expected, after having incapacitated me, the hospital staff would take me to the insane asylum. For life. *Of all people, why must all of those horrors trouble me?*