

## A PATIENT'S REACTION TO A "LUNACY" CHARGE

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Following a brief case history, the writer presents a letter by a paranoid schizophrenic. The letter is addressed to the court which committed her to a State hospital as "lunatic," or rather on a "lunacy charge".

The letter, written by a well-educated patient, not only shows the characteristic symptoms, which she expressed better in writing than orally, but also teaches that schizophrenics, in spite of definite aberrations in the emotional sphere, are at times still sensitive, and that when "charged with lunacy" even a schizophrenic cannot be called oversensitive when the reaction to the "lunacy charge" comes forth as expressed in this letter.

S.B. was admitted to a State hospital about ten years ago, at the age of 36 years. She was a white, housewife; college education; one child. Tonsillectomy at 17 years. She had had one abortion.

Ten years before admission she had a "nervous breakdown" while at work. This attack lasted about four and one-half months, irritability and exhaustion being the chief symptoms, and the patient was cared for at home.

The present attack began three years after the first and immediately following childbirth. She became disoriented and confused but the condition cleared up after some months. Later there were recurrences. Throughout all of her attacks she had been irritable, suspicious, fearful for the future of her child, imagined that her parents were ill and that she was taking care of them and they did not respond to her treatment. She also thought that her parents and husband were working against her and that her parents were trying to kill her. She believed they were not religious, and was extremely religious herself. She was introspective and was often found talking to herself. She had great fear of her son becoming a drunkard. During her entire life she had a strong "fear complex". Physical condition: endocrinal underdevelopment; underweight and anemic. Diagnosis: schizophrenia, paranoid type.

The patient's letter to the court follows:

My dear Sir:

Your letter of . . . is at hand.

I appreciate your courtesy and decency to send this letter direct to me rather than occultly employing other people to stab me with false accusations which have no foundation only in the minds of those who are mentally ill and who are inclined to believe everything they see and read and who are too prone too frequently to form hasty judgments without taking more time to do sane reasoning.

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I believe this petition was filed at a time when my husband was disturbed mentally and when he should have been shielded by an adult who would know better than to classify both parties or even one as a lunatic.

Rather than accuse a person of lunacy, I would recommend adults who are physically, mentally and spiritually fit to guide a person safely through any periods of despondency. Doctors who sense how easily people are tripped up without any forewarning will certainly understand or any person with sufficient intelligence medically.

According to Daniel Webster's dictionary a lunatic is one who is prone to be extravagant even to the point of insanity. Lunacy is unsoundness of mind, extravagant folly, and madness.

The adjective lunar is of or pertaining to the moon, and is measured by the moon's revolutions.

At times I may be inclined to make hasty judgments. Generally I am not inclined to belittle, degrade, or demoralize another person in any manner, shape or form. I am desirous of being healthy and keeping healthy.

State hospitals aim to straighten out any mental or physical disturbances. They also do not desire to neglect the spiritual side of our existence.

As far as desiring to harm another, I have never had any such motive and for this reason see no reason why I should have a lunacy charge placed against me. I do believe in parental discipline and in parents assuming responsibility over their own children, provided their health permits.

When my husband places a lunacy charge against his wife, according to our grand court council if I know court law, and I believe I do, he is instantaneously outlawed as far as being a guardian over his wife according to the dictates of my best judgment. ¶ If I have erred in my best judgment, please notify me.

This symbol ¶ means a new paragraph and is desirable, permissible and vitally necessary according to my knowledge of mass coherence for clarity, unity and brevity.

Perhaps some situation has aggravated him to such an extent that the said petition is now on file.

Does her husband know how to master his own body, to take care of his bodily needs daily? Is his home neat and respectable? How does he deal with his child? Is he sufficiently fit mentally, spiritually and physically to assume such responsibility? How does he rate with you?

What authority do you have to place such a charge against me? My course in Human Behavior has trained me that we are the product of our heredity and our environment.

Such a charge as you have placed against me is certainly worth while thinking about it. I do not know what stars were shining the night I was born or whether the moon was  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  or a full moon.

As far as extravagance is concerned, that is most amusing when I inform you that these State internes that turn the keys on us, allow us one dollar a week for our weekly accessories!

I observe that the word lunatic has an "n" in it. Neurosis has an "N". Luminal tablets have an "n" in them. They are used by most doctors for quieting and calming an individual. How about recommending luminal tablets to those individuals who have caused your letter to be written?

My study here in this hospital helps me to recall to memory the spasmodic,

quick, or hasty judgments I have formulated in the past. However, all folks are entitled to formulate their own opinions. For this reason I see no reason why a lunacy charge should be placed against me.

If there are certain treatments which I am supposed to take, I shall go by the authorities who are recognized officially to know their stuff medically whoever they may be.

I shall be willing to permit Dr. O. to do the dental work for me if I have the money to pay him.

Why should I constantly be embarrassed financially? To think that I am not able to have my teeth repaired without going through all kind of red tape is disgusting. However I am happy to have the privilege to write you this letter. (But the letter was not mailed, in accordance with hospital rules.)

I see you are desirous of learning the cause of any mental discrepancy on my part. At times my power of organizing my thoughts is retarded by mass domination.

My observations are the following: lunatic has an "n" in it. Nurse has an "N" in it. Could it be that too much nurse domination is the cause of my difficulty?

As far as lunacy is concerned, I am not insane and never have been. I have been ill physically and mentally debilitated as most women are in the course of a lifetime. However I see no reason why the Court should take advantage of me and accuse me falsely of insanity.

I see no reason why I should move my furniture if my husband is going to turn tables on me and place a lunacy charge against me for that charge in itself would hinder my progress and deprive me of my legal right to earn my own living.

When my husband grows up sufficiently to recognize my adult intelligence, then I shall have plenty of time to decide what to do with the furniture.

As far as being ill is concerned, I am feeling fine, eat three meals a day and am able to carry out the nurses' orders.

Now why should my husband place a lunacy charge against me? Perhaps he is weary or needs a good rest or a change. Perhaps he is assuming more responsibility than he should.

I have always tried to the best of my ability to help him in as many ways as I knew how. I am naturally a happy disposition and resent living with people who think otherwise. My folks are homeloving people and are not the type that want to be on the go constantly.

As far as my husband assuming guardianship over me is concerned, is he mentally, physically and spiritually capable of assuming such responsibility? If so, his adult counsel will be welcome and appreciated. I believe he should purify his own thoughts from the contamination and disunity which has disturbed his poise, composure, ease and mental balance. When he erases the charge which he has placed against me from his memory, we shall both recuperate more rapidly and with sufficient dexterity.

What has caused him to accuse me of lunacy, I ask you. Kindly reply at your earliest convenience.

The right to earn my own living is necessary in this day and age of competition.

If I am to appear in court, how could I get there without money to pay my fare?

Yours truly,

(Signed)

This letter is a typical schizophrenic product with its definite paranoid trend throughout, its occasional sarcasm, the projection of her own mental disease upon her husband, calling him mentally disturbed, the meticulous definition of the term "lunacy," "lunatic," symbolization, occasional stilted verbal expression.

The fractions of the moon may indicate the splitting of her personality. Peculiar is the idea association regarding words that also contain an "N" like "lunatic".

She has some insight. She admits depression and that "the power of organizing her thoughts is retarded," however, she blames this on "mass domination". From "mass domination" she shifts to "nurse domination" because nurse has an "N" in it like "lunatic".

Because she is regressing she writes "when her husband grows up sufficiently".

It is characteristic that she states she feels fine, as most paranoid schizophrenics do. However, their environment does not feel fine about them!

She is always on the defensive and mostly when she states she is "naturally a happy disposition." Her symptomatology shows the contrary.

The writer met her husband when he came to see his wife and asked about her "progress" during hospitalization.

The progress in a paranoid schizophrenic is usually progressive need for hospitalization, the disagreeable truth of which he experienced himself as she poured a shower of scolding over him so that he had to retreat. He gave the impression of a truly henpecked husband who was too shy and too easy to handle the paranoid wife.

But one thing we can learn from this patient's letter, aside from its being a clear illustration of schizophrenic symptoms; this is the fact that mental patients, so long as they are not much deteriorated, accept the terms "nervousness," "depression," "melancholy," eventually also "nervous breakdown," but they do resent the term "insanity" and "lunacy". Although it all means practically the same thing, the words "insanity," "insane," "lunacy," and "lunatic" seem to be just too strong, too cruel for acceptance by mental patients.

It is time for certain hospitals and certain Courts to abandon their antiquated terminology and to begin to incorporate into both their activities and their terminology the science of neuropsychiatry.

Many mental patients show increased excitement, anger or tears when they are handed a court paper that declares them "insane" or "lunatic". The writer calms the recipients of these ominous documents by telling them: "Don't mind this! It is merely red tape. You don't have to do anything about it. You can throw it away. It only shows that our courts are still old-fashioned." Many a patient would say: "I am not insane, just nervous."

Why hurt people when they are already hurt by being afflicted with a mental disease?

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