

August 12, 2003

Dear Mr. Dillinger,

By way of introduction, I met you at the Suncoast Center For Community Health's awards and benefit luncheon at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club in February of this year. At that time, both you and I received awards. You received an award for your advocacy involving mentally ill individuals within the criminal justice system, and I received an award for being a recipient of the results of your advocacy and making the most of it.

I am the lady who gave the Hiroshima speech and deliberately looked your way. I happened to be researching information about NAMI and came upon your website quite by accident.

You deserved your award.

After reading through the site, I realized why I found help when I was incarcerated in the Pinellas County Jail. I had never committed a serious crime in my life, but I was beleaguered by tremendous pressures that eventually led to disaster. I found myself in jail, charged with first degree attempted murder. I, like so many others, had failed to overtake the aggressive nature of the unknown elements that work to erode sanity.

Alone in a strange environment, confronted by a lifestyle completely unimagined, I certainly had nowhere and no one to turn to for help. Then, I began having visits by people from the Public Defender's office. I met Ray Williams and saw him as a beacon. I met Dudley Clapp and through his assurance saw my situation as one that could be met and overcome. In the end, I came to view him in a most familial way. Judge Shames was remarkable.

When I saw you at the luncheon, I did not know who you were at first. When we were introduced, I knew that I must address my remarks to you with the hope you would not only know of my deep understanding of your mark upon my life, but that you would also forward my warm thoughts to Mr. Williams, Mr. Clapp and Judge Shames as well.

Now that I have read the information on your website, I understand even more. I have included an attachment with this letter. It is the speech I gave at the awards luncheon. I thought you might like to have a copy of it. You have my permission to publish it on your page if you wish. If you omit my name, I will be grateful. I made a few changes to it, because I had to give the speech again to a group of E.M.S. people and policemen. Most of what you originally heard at the luncheon is still there. Perhaps, this letter might contribute in a small way to your having the new mental health facility constructed near the jail.

Take care, Mr. Dillinger, and keep up the fight. It is worth it.

By the way, I have a website too. I sell seed from time to time.

<http://www.papayasandfriends.com/Index2.htm>

Sincerely,

(name withheld)

SPEECH

Shortly after World War Two, John Hersey wrote a book called, "Hiroshima". In that book, he chronicled lives of people in that city before, during, and after delivery of the atomic bomb. There is a famous photograph of the city taken shortly after the blast. It depicts a leveled landscape with only the skeletal framework of an arch, a dome at it's center. If you have read Hersey's book, and remember that photograph, you have both a written record and image of mental assault and psychological collapse.

Nobody chooses mental injury. Whether brought on by devise or developed from within, it is one of the most devastating events a living being can endure. As far as the mind's eye can see, the landscape of the mind resembles the landscape of Hiroshima. As the buildings of that city were reduced to rubble and ash, so a history of living on this planet is reduced. As the people of that city were vaporized, so memories, knowledge and awareness of self are vaporized. As the survivors of that cataclysm walked dazed and bleeding through the streets, so remaining facets of the mentally assaulted individual walk the streets of the conscious mind.

That city was populated with the poor, the accomplished, the learned and the privileged. They were going about their lives much as we do. They had families, aspirations, spiritual beliefs, dreams, and histories. There were men in prisons, farmers bringing their produce to the city for sale, women caring for children, teachers instructing students, poets composing lines, artists with brush in hand, politicians going about the business of government, soldiers in training, men of commerce engaged in commerce. Each was engrossed in the business of living. Each was unaware of their impending and dire future.

When disaster came, it came to all. It did not spare the wealthy, the poet, the artist, the politician, the prisoner, the teacher or the man of commerce. It paid no respect to the structure of an ancient and rich culture. It swallowed up the righteous and the unrighteous. It vaporized saint and sinner alike. It obliterated the past, made the present unrecognizable and poisoned the future.

If you understand these events, you have insight into the insidious nature of mental assault. The mind within the being stands alone, unprepared for the trauma that may, in the end, even separate it from knowledge of itself. As the mind bleeds out, the character and behavior of the individual changes. The afflicted person becomes unrecognizable to family, friends, co-workers, lovers, even themselves. What is worse, the exterior of the person remains unchanged. There are no visible wounds, no lacerations or broken bones. We are a society that needs to see injury before we offer help or develop sympathy. We understand invasive surgery, broken bodies in emergency rooms, outwardly manifest diseases. We do not understand Hiroshima of the mind.

As the afflicted gradually lose the ability to communicate with the self, they also exhibit a marked inability to communicate with others. The unresolved and indefinable advance of a mental disorder thrusts it's victim into an ever-deepening abyss. The bleak loneliness of that place cannot be described. This world with all it's abundant beauties, and wealth of opportunities has been

excised from the mind. The new world has you disarmed, and caged in the dark with a formidable and faceless enemy. Each moment of every day, you battle for the right to be a whole individual. Life becomes a war fought within the meat of your own skull. Each day, you lose ground.

Finally, you collapse. The manner of that collapse comes in a myriad of ways. You yourselves encounter it every day. There are murders, drowned children, mutilations, assaults, stabbings, suicides, drug abuse and molestations. Are these tragedies limited to the criminal, the poor, and the uneducated? They are not. All are susceptible. Every living being is a candidate for devastation. No one is immune.

Unfortunately, many mental disorders go untreated until the collapse comes and the outward manifestation of that collapse brings the victim into both the medical and legal system. The victims have victimized. The jails and courts are left to salvage the shattered remains of what was once a whole and healthy individual, or relegate them to the prisons and mental institutions. For some, the legal system is the end of the road, the end of any opportunity for a productive life. For others, it is the beginning of restoration.

At this very moment, dedicated and most assuredly overworked professionals are in the Pinellas County Jail meeting face to face with people who lost their war within the mind. I know this for a fact, because I was one of those failed people. I lost the battle for my self, and as so many others do, committed a violent act during my collapse. Shortly thereafter, I attempted suicide. I chose to settle into a much longed for peace, an anticipated return to a realm unpopulated by thugs who, in guise of darkness, come to make war within human minds.

Obviously, I am not in that place now, nor am I in jail or a mental hospital. I am here today because of intervention. I am here because E.M.S. people and policemen responded quickly to an emergency call and saved my life. I am here because people I did not know took time to listen to and deliberate upon my case. I am here because individuals made informed and purposeful decisions on my behalf. I am here because of the forgiveness of a few and the concern of many. I am here because the legal system has joined hands with the mental health community for the express purpose of salvaging lives. If this were not so, I would instead be serving a life sentence in prison or a state mental institution.

I have been restored to family and friends, my garden, my books, my spiritual pursuits, my pets, my beloved code of ethics, my home, this world. Because of the mindset and motivation of this community my world, and in some ways, your world, has been rid of what comes as a thug in the night. This restoration, made manifest through the hearts and hands of it's individual members, is one example of what a community can accomplish when it is aware of and concerned with each of it's members.

Each day, you as an E.M.S. professional, or policeman, are confronted with the end result of what exists as a war between what fosters life and what seeks it's destruction. You live in a world unseen to the general population. While most people are going about their every day lives, you are operating at emergency level on the battlefield that exists beneath the underpinnings of this

society. You clean up the human wreckage that represents failure to cope with life in this world. Without prejudice you protect and serve, mend and restore people you do not know. When I said, "Let me go," one among you said, "No. I can't do that." When I was in the hospital, frightened and shackled to a bed while waiting to be transported to jail, policemen I did not know came to look in on me. I have not forgotten. All of you have my respect and gratitude.

I was represented by a fine public defender, interviewed by caring psychiatrists and reassured by forensic investigators. A treatment plan was instituted. When I came before the judge, I was given a fair hearing and an opportunity to speak on my own behalf. Despite the nature of the charge against me, the State Attorney's office sought a reasonable and equitable agreement with the court. I am grateful to all of them for their consideration.

Ultimately, I was placed on an outpatient program at Suncoast Hospital. From the beginning, Suncoast has provided me with the essentials required to rebuild. I have had counseling, home visitations, invitations to call or visit whenever the need arose and prescriptions for medication. I have received information about alternative financial resources and programs. Most recently, I was invited to be an advisor to the FORENSIC FACT program.

The FORENSIC FACT program is comprised of professionals in the fields of law enforcement, medicine, psychiatry, and social work. They visit jails and other institutions looking for people they determine are salvageable despite their circumstances; people much like myself. Their purpose is to do for those individuals what has been done for me. In brief, they help to rebuild the whole individual. They do not remake the individual. They give each person room to heal with the hope that that effort will facilitate an eventual return to a stable lifestyle. The program has been highly successful in other states. I invite you to contact Suncoast Hospital if you desire more information.

Certainly, we cannot erase the past. Surely, we can come to terms with what has been, what is and what will be. All of this is achievable when handled one day at a time through deliberate decision making and deep affection for a higher order of being. In that peaceful place those issues are not burdensome. Instead, they are crystal clear, unadulterated by distraction or reproach, accepted as part of a singular destiny. The realization of that truth leaves one humble, unhurried, receptive to the polishing that time and hopefully, wisdom itself affects.

Once again, I assure you that your decisions can change lives for the better. These are the small battles that when won, may foreshadow what will come for others who find themselves diminished and all too vulnerable. The wisdom required for seeing beyond what appears to be, to what actually is, is rare. Exercising that wisdom through acts of impartial and knowledgeable care for people unknown to you, is ennobling and further empowers what exists at the heart of law itself...equal justice and the compassionate dissemination of it.

A friend once said to me, "Look up at the stars; see your face." Recovery can turn on a word, or the loving concern of a friend or stranger. As a city can rise from the ashes; so can the individual. Your personal involvement in the lives of people you encounter every day can affect essential transformations and recoveries. There are programs like FACT that can assist you in your work.

Thank you.