

Beyond Confusion

If any of you read the interview with me in the July issue, or our absolutely wonderful chapbook that just got a great review in the Stranger (this is a shameless plug), you know I am bipolar. This does not mean I attract metal filings. It means I have highly disruptive swings in energy and mood that have nothing to do with my will or whatever is happen-

Anitra Freeman

ing in my life. These swings have to do with physical chemistry, and for me, right now, they can only be controlled by chemicals.

I spoke once at Seattle Prep School, about the *Real Change* and the real people called homeless, and showing as best I could that not all the "mentally ill" are wild-eyed axe wielders.

I don't even own a guitar.

In the first question afterward, one young woman asked, "What is something WE can do to about homelessness?"

My answer was, "Take care of YOURSELF, right now.

"If you have long stretches where you just can't do ANYTHING, talk to your family doctor. If there are things going on at home you just can't talk about, find SOMEONE you can talk to about it. If a friend is the life of the party one week, and a dead rock the next, over and over again, get her to talk to a doctor.

"Because at least half of homelessness starts right here, or earlier - in child abuse, family alcoholism, undiagnosed and untreated mental illness, schooling not completed for many, many reasons."

And there are people at work in offices in Seattle right now who will be homeless within a year. For some, it will be for economic reasons.

For others, it will be because the boss finally decided that your days out sick, or slumped at your desk about as productive as a hanged dog, are no longer balanced out by the ninety-hour weeks outproducing the infantry. Because he's never quite sure where you'll be next deadline.

Or that quiet, efficient little shipping clerk, Ms. Something-or-Other, will suddenly start mumbling non-stop to everybody and to nobody, "...sometimes people have metal bugs stuck up their noses and sometimes people have metal bugs stuck in their scalps and ..." And months after she's gone to the hospital, someone will hear from someone that 33-year-old Ms. Blank was raped and tortured, 30 years ago.

Some things just don't stay down.

To use myself as an example, again: my mother used to comment that at three years old I went through a "personality change", from being a highly active, outgoing and aggressive leader to being a sweet, passive, slow-moving dreamer. From then on I went through days

when I read ALL the time, and days when I organized the entire neighborhood into wargames.

I drove high-school counselors crazy with things like getting an A in Latin and flunking English composition, accomplishing amazing things in a special project and then going dead-dull on it. As I grew older the roller-coaster disrupted my life more and more. But I found "explanations" in the headlines, the weather patterns, coincidences with family news, or just "burnout".

By my thirties I had become EXTREMELY introspective, and an accomplished cartographer of all paths of spiritual, nutritional, and psychological self-help. I had tried everything from Jesus to chocolate.

Even after my brother was diagnosed "hyperactive" (now called Attention Deficit Disorder), I was never diagnosed. Because I didn't fit the standard pattern of Attention Deficit Disorder. Now I know that disease created part of my difficulties in school. But at the time, Mom explained that I was just "too intelligent for them".

Even after my mother was diagnosed manic-depressive, I wasn't diagnosed. I didn't fit the standard pattern. I didn't have hallucinations. I didn't have rages. I didn't think I was God. Smarter than the rest of you poor dears, yes, but not God. And much too merciful than to tell any poor doctor that I was smarter than her.

I was, however, manic.

Even in the depths of my depressions, doctors I visited never diagnosed me as depressed. I was never suicidal. I didn't cry a lot. I slept. Solidly. Up to fourteen hours a day. I hadn't lost my appetite: I ate LOTS. Especially chocolate and carbos. I was easily

confused, forgetful, not up to doing much of anything. But I could crack jokes and laugh with the doctor.

It's now called atypical depression. It's now recognized as real.

My life turned around most dramatically when my sister sat me down and corrected my misunderstandings about manic depression, and I found a doctor who didn't have the same misunderstandings.

What can YOU do about homelessness? For one thing, learn the real signals of mental illness. Running down the hall with an axe is not really a common diagnostic indicator. (An extremely small proportion of the mentally ill are actually violent.)

If you have access to the Internet, check out these web sites:

<http://www.cmhc.com/sxlist.htm> - Mental Disorders Index

<http://www.onlinepsych.com/treat/mh.htm#P8> - Mental Health Info Link

http://www.mindspring.com/~hugman/pendulum/criteria/recognizing_bp.htm - Bipolar Disorder (Manic-Depression) - Criteria

<http://www.mindspring.com/~hugman/pendulum> - The Pendulum Pages

If you don't have access to the Internet,

Wanted: Experienced Ad Salesperson

Put Your Skills to Work for Real Change

- flexible, part-time
- earn commission
- relaxed professional environment
- help this paper succeed

Real Change is looking for an experienced part-time ad rep to help us expand. Mail Resume to: Madeline Lewis, Real Change, 2129 2nd Ave., Seattle, WA 98121

talk to your librarian. She'll get you signed on. Also check out these books: "Manic-Depressive Illness" by Fredrick K. Goodwin, M.D., & Kay Redfield Jamison, Ph.D.

"Thinking in Pictures" by Temple Grandin, a woman with autism.

"Welcome to My Country", by Lauren Slater (reviewed in this issue)

"Media Madness", by Otto F. Wahl

If you think you or someone you know may have a mental illness, please get yourself (or them) a thorough medical check-out first. Many things, from low blood sugar to allergies, can cause symptoms of mental illness.

If you are already homeless, and you are having emotional or mental difficulties that make it harder than even usual to cope and solve the problem, visit the Access Project at 511 Third Avenue. They can get you checked out, and help you find the help you need.

And if your office would like to hear more, call the Real Change Speaker's Bureau at 441-3247. I'd be glad to come over.

**Michael Tomlinson
in Concert
Friday, October 18th
8:00 PM \$15.00**



*Calling Me
Back
to the Wild*

November 8 - 10

**Michael Harner
The Way of the
Shaman Workshop
Friday eve lecture 7:30 pm \$10
Weekend workshop \$190**

**Seattle Unity Church
200 8th Ave. North
(206) 622-8475**

HOST HOME PROGRAM EASTSIDE HOMEOWNERS IS HOME SHARING FOR YOU?

**Can you provide a caring,
and safe environment for
a single woman or single
parent family?**

- Flexible time commitment
- Training/support services
- Applicants screened
- Weekly contacts by staff
- Guest provides own food

For more information,
Call Host Home Program at
(206) 562-6858



A program of Catholic Community
Services of East King County

**Wake Up Mr. Murphy!!
You are not in New York
We are in Wallingford
BRANDON'S DELI & SPICE
632-5415
1719 N 45th Seattle
Fresh made Deli Sandwiches
Exotic Herbs' & Spices
Vegetarian Items**



**Homemade Cinnamon Rolls
Old Fashioned Shakes
Breakfast A-L-L Day**

OPEN 7-3 EVERYDAY

**Mae's Phinney Ridge Cafe
65th & Phinney 782-1222**