

People

David Pettersen

Ten years ago a social worker at the North Bay Psychiatric Hospital told David Pettersen he would "never be able to work again." The social worker and other members of staff were convinced that Pettersen was "lazy" even though he had had 120 shock treatments in a 2½-year period and was on massive doses of stelazine.

"Getting shock was one of the most frightening things I had ever experienced" recounts Pettersen. "It was like being in hell. I had it the old way. I was injected with a drug that paralysed me so I couldn't move or even breathe, and then I was wheeled into the room and waited to be put asleep with the shock. It was like being in a concentration camp".

"It was like being in a concentration camp."

Today Pettersen is a steady worker with Go Temp, an Ontario government agency that provides workers to government offices on a temporary basis, and has missed only a day and a half through sickness in the last two years. He hasn't been back in a psychiatric hospital since 1970.

Pettersen's been working with Go Temp since 1976, and has been at his latest assignment as a data control clerk for the last two years. "I was only supposed to be there for six months," explains Pettersen, "but they liked my work." He describes his present boss as very supportive and his working conditions good.

Shock Docs

If you, a member of your family, or a friend has received shock from a Canadian doctor and wants his or her name added to our list, send us the name, hospital affiliation and city. PLEASE SIGN YOUR LETTER; we will not use names submitted anonymously. However, we will at your request withhold your name. Additions to the list should be sent to: Shock Doctor List, Phoenix Rising, Box 7251, Station A, Toronto, Ontario M5W 1X9.

Pettersen first went into a psychiatric hospital when he was 17. Diagnosed as "manic depressive", Pettersen was in and out of psychiatric hospitals for twenty years.



Most of his endeavours during the sixties didn't work out, and at one point he was badly burned in a hotel fire in St. John, New Brunswick, when he had to run through a hallway of flames to escape. Pettersen still bears faint scars from this incident on his arms. The depression that resulted from the fire landed him back in North Bay Psychiatric Hospital in 1967.

After his discharge Pettersen moved back in with his parents and started working again. "I wasn't offered the opportunity not to work," says Pettersen, who was not receiving benefits at the time.

Pettersen continued to take high doses of Stelazine--30 milligrams a day into the early seventies. This and the stress of trying to work with a mind clouded with drugs and the after-effects of shock made him so anxious he felt like a "fighter pilot". "I wouldn't have experienced a lot of the pain of the seventies if I had been on disability pension," says Pettersen, but adds that the initial "pain" was worth the "gain".

With the assistance of a sympathetic "client-centred" psychiatrist, Pettersen

was able to reduce his dosage of Stelazine to the four milligrams that he continues to take today. Although Pettersen had a drug holiday in the mid-seventies, he finds the low dosage helps him handle his mood swings and keep a job.

Pettersen credits religion, a close friend he met in the mid-seventies, and his psychiatrist for helping him stay out of hospital for the last twelve years.

When Pettersen was depressed and between assignments in the seventies, and wanted to go back to the hospital, his psychiatrist talked him out of it and urged him to go back to school and upgrade his job skills instead.

His friend has given him the motivation to force himself to go in for work even if he's had difficulty sleeping the night before, which sometimes happens to him. "It takes more courage to stay up all night and go into work, than to be a person who sleeps soundly and then goes into work." Christianity has given him the ability to forgive and forget the past. "It gives you good things to think about. It gives you a sense of purpose when things aren't rosy or even when they are rosy".

Since Pettersen started doing volunteer work Saturday mornings at the Scott Mission, washing dishes for 600 men, he feels a lot clearer and more energetic on the week-ends. "One thing that experience at the Mission has done for me is that it's helped me fight lethargy. I'm not as sensitive as I was before."

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And since he's reduced his dosage of Stelazine, he's been able to do a lot more and see more people.

Advice for other ex-psychiatric inmates who might be trying to get back on their feet again:

"Some people are cruel. A person who's out of hospital and runs into a person like that will want to quit. If you have enough other positive things going on in your life you'll be able to shrug it off."