

**Summary of CAEST rally to protest electroshock at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital
Austin, Texas
4-24-06**

The Seton Shoal Creek Hospital electroshock rally--on Monday, April 24th at noon--was the first public event of the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas (CAEST). The rally followed months of dialogue with The Seton Board and the hospital. Correspondence and meetings with state legislators, a city council member, and the Travis county Hospital District all resulted in calls to the Seton Board. The chair of the Seton Board of Trustees, Sister Helen Brewer, has refused thus far to meet directly with us, however, and is arguing that electroshock is a medical operations issue, and not a Board governance issue. Much of this chronology and correspondence is posted in the progress section of our website, www.endofshock.com

We went public yesterday with a bang. We had about 50 committed, strong, vocal people at the rally and made our presence known in a powerful way.

We started with a minute of silence, focusing our loving intention directly on the hospital. Then we thanked each other for being there. I spoke first about the coming together of CAEST and our actions thus far. I emphasized, through one of our many signs, the difference between LOVING CARE--nurturance, compassion, healing--and ELECTROSHOCK--brain damage, memory loss, compassion, death. I described electroshock as a crime against humanity--posted on another sign with those words and an image of a man being shocked.

I then shifted attention to a third sign, which said in small letters at the top, "Dear Daughters of Charity," and in very big letters, "Shocking our daughters is not Charity!--signed "caest." The corporation that runs Seton Seton is called Daughters of Charity Health Services of Austin. The hospitals are named after the first American-born Catholic saint, Elizabeth Ann Seton, known as Mother Seton. She founded the Sisters of Charity, and is famous for her caring and devotion to the poor and suffering. I discovered the morning of our rally that Mother Seton had experienced great anguish and emotional distress in her life, and suffered a period of great depression in her later years. Of course, the treatment rationale for electroshock is called depression. I shared this and the following quote from Mother Seton's own journal:

"This wretched reasoning--laudanum--the praise and thanks of excessive joy not to have done the 'horrid deed'--the promise of eternal gratitude."

Have you ever heard of a saint--or more common activist heroes like you and me--who did not experience a "dark night of the soul"? I imagine that Mother Seton's friends and family--and certainly the relevant medical professionals--were strongly encouraging her to take this opium derivative to treat her depression. By NOT having done the horrid deed, she was able to experience excessive joy and eternal gratitude. What an abomination and tragic irony that Mother Seton's legacy includes electroshocking our brothers and sisters because they are "depressed."

Mostly, I emphasized the personal. I was deeply happy and grateful that my dear friend

of many years, 79-year-old Mimi Greenberg, was there in her wheelchair. Deeply hurt by psychiatry, including electroshock many years ago, I first met Mimi when she showed up trembling on my doorstep, her first approach to a “doctor” in 15-20 years because she was so afraid of doctors. As recently as 2 months ago, when she was taken to the hospital for an MRI, Mimi could not go through with the procedure, which included being strapped down on her back. She came back to her nursing home in tears and felt very bad about it. When I gently asked her whether it might have anything to do with her experience of electroshock, she immediately broke down in tears, and held my hand as she trembled and discharged fear.

I let everyone there know that public action was necessary because the medical psychiatric profession was incapable of policing itself. As an example, I shared the very recent case of Simone D., which CAEST legal advisers Dennis Feld and Kim Darrow have just argued in the New York appellate court. Simone had already received over 150 and probably over 200 shocks. She is under a court order for 30 more. The decision of the 4 appellate judges is still out. Darrow told me via email that “one of the judges responded to the argument that credence must be given to Simone's expressions to her doctor that shock causes her pain and suffering by saying something to the effect that pain is given in order for shock to work and therefore her statements were of little significance.”

I told the story of Benjamin Rush, whose face still emblazons the seal of the American Psychiatric Association, and how he treated George Washington by bloodletting—how it may be said that the founding father of American Psychiatry killed the founding father of our country. I quoted Rush:

“TERROR acts powerfully upon the body, through the medium of the mind, and should be employed in the cure of madness. FEAR accompanied with PAIN and a sense of SHAME, has sometimes cured this disease. Bartholin speaks in high terms of what he calls 'flagellation' in certain diseases.”

Our self-described radio gun, Jack Blood, of *Deadline Live*, spoke next about freedom of consciousness. He talked about Francis Farmer, and how creative people and activists often fall victim to psychiatric oppression. This led me to speak about two Austin area singer-songwriters who have been in the local news a great deal in the last few months. A new documentary, *Be Here To Love Me*, came out in December about Townes Van Zandt. A poignant scene in the movie occurred as Townes' sister spoke of the fact that their mother's one regret was that she followed the recommendations of the best medical help she could find who electroshocked her son.

The man whom the Austin media has been celebrating of late as the Comeback King after decades of suffering, Roky Erickson, of 13th Floor Elevator fame, played the Saturday night before the rally at Austin's Earth Day Music Festival. His mother, Evelyn Erickson, who feels betrayed by the fact of her son's devastating history with psychiatry, including electroshock, marched with us, carrying a pink sign that read, “Don't Shock Your Mama!”

Our next speaker was Allen Davisson of Texas Health Freedom, who painted a big picture for us, that electroshock at Seton Shoal Creek was one step in our process of

reclaiming power, freedom and liberty. Like Gary, Allen's emphasis was on the truth.

Lee Spiller, executive director of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, was final speaker. He evoked the image of steering committee member Dianna Loper, the "founding mother" of Texas historic legislative efforts of the 1990s, largely responsible for the fact that in Texas at least our children are protected from electroshock. Lee told a tiny bit of Dianna's story—how after electroshock she literally did not even remember that she had a new baby boy. Lee emphasized that electroshock is a massive human rights violation, and pointed to the hospital as he called for Seton Shoal Creek to abandon electroshock and embrace a psychiatric wellness program that provides genuine medical evaluation and care for the various real medical conditions that may result in so-called psychiatric symptoms.

As we prepared to walk, I encouraged the crowd to hold a focus based on the following image, which I read from the slightly modified conclusion of my 2001 testimony to the New York State Assembly hearings on forced electroshock.

In her novel, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison describes the farm where her character grew up as a slave: "It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if Hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world."

Boys hanging dead from the most beautiful sycamores in the world.
Unconscious, brain-damaged patients lying on electroshock tables in the most impressive psychiatric institutions like Seton Shoal Creek Hospital.

Boys hanging, dead.

Victims of forced electroshock, brains damaged, memory lost, potential healing suppressed, sometimes dead.

At the dawn of the 20th century in the United States, a black Southerner died at the hands of a white mob more than once a week. Society accepted the practice; some newspapers not only covered lynchings, but even advertised them. At the dawn of the 21st century, psychiatrists electroshock about 2,000 United States citizens every week. Society accepts the practice; the media not only covers it, but even promotes it.

Just as brave leaders and activists won civil rights legislation that led to a massive decline in the dehumanizing and degrading practice of racism, activists like you are now challenging the brutal practice of electroshock.

Then the fun began. We walked back and forth along a very busy 38th Street, with all our signs, including "HONK if you hate electroshock." We chanted "NO MORE SHOCK!" and generated a lot of noise and attention. Then we marched back and forth on the street right in front of Seton Shoal Creek, and it was awesome to look back as the street was filled with citizens carrying signs turned toward the hospital, and loudly chanting "No More Shock!" One woman stood by her car in Seton Shoal Creek parking lot, watching us pass with her jaw hanging open. A protester talked briefly with her as she said, "They're not doing that anymore. I can't believe it!"

