

My Journey to the Dark Side of the Moon

It was a very bright and hot July day. My older sister and I were carrying my yellow four-poster bed down the stairs to the second bedroom of her apartment. When I walked into the room I remember seeing all of my furniture arranged in the room and we quickly set up my bed as well. This small remembrance is important because it is the first clear memory I have after I finished ECT (Electro Convulsive Therapy).

I had been in and out of the hospital about four times from September of 2004 to January of 2005. The doctor had me on many different types of drugs until he came up with the combination I was on at that time. I was on a combination of seven different drugs, most at the highest dosage allowed. Yet I was still so depressed I was alternately cutting myself and trying to overdose on over the counter drugs. I was so emotionally bankrupt I didn't know which way to turn or what to do next. I placed my total trust in my psychiatrist and his expertise.

Having been in the hospital for about a month this time, I had tried all of the drug therapies combined with the therapies the hospital offered and nothing helped. My psychiatrist suggested one last therapy. I was desperate, not realizing that the drugs I was taking were most of the problem. I was about to compound my already desperate situation by once again blindly accepting the word of my doctor as gospel. He suggested to me that I take ECT, (Electro Convulsive Therapy). Immediately the scene from the movie *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* came to mind followed shortly by the thought, "they don't really do that any more do they?" I did not even know what this therapy entailed. Nevertheless, being in the position I was in, I accepted his word that ECT was my only choice

I began ECT in January of 2005 and it continued at least once a week until July of the same year. My family and I do not know how many treatments I actually received due to the fact that the hospital in question lost three months of my records, however we do know of at least 34. I and my friends with the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas (www.endofshock.com) studied what records we could get our hands on and discovered many discrepancies.

The alarm clock was set for 7am so I would be ready for a family member to take me to my appointment on time. Still my sister often had to come in after the alarm went off to make sure I had indeed gotten up. I was taking so many medications at the time that I would often sleep through the alarm. That first day when I arrived in the waiting room for ECT, the RN greeted me with a stack of papers and a cup of pills. I honestly do not remember what all the papers were for except I do remember signing a consent paper. Evidently she explained what each paper was for before I signed them and I also signed a consent paper for each treatment. I know the consent paper was signed each time because my family told me so—not because I remember doing it. One of the biggest drawbacks to having this treatment is that you lose memory—not just the memory of the event but big blocks of time before and after. I was told that when the treatment was finished my lost memory would return. For me this was patently untrue.

The pill I was given on my first visit was an anti reflux drug; however, after a few treatments a second pill was added. When I was later able to get some of my records I discovered this was a sedative. Towards the end of my treatments I was given an IV injection of Geodon. This last drug I was never informed I was given. After arriving for

each appointment I would sign in, sign my consent form, then take my pills. A few minutes later the RN returned and escorted me to the treatment room. On the first visit I walked in to the room to see a huge machine embedded into the wall behind the doctor. I remember thinking that it looked like the pictures I had seen of the equipment the electric company uses to run their turbines. In front of that was a stretcher and behind that stood the doctor and the anesthesiologist. I was always asked to take off my shoes and any jewelry I was wearing. I lay down on the stretcher, then the anesthesiologist placed a mask over my nose and mouth and an IV was started and drugs administered. This is where my recollections end and I have to rely on what my family members have told me.

My older sister, who took me to most of my appointments, told me that when I came out of recovery to go home I would frequently be unsteady to the point of not being able to stand up without assistance. At times I had to be taken out in a wheelchair. She also told me that most of the time I had urinated on myself and went home in wet clothes. I remember being told by several people that it is typical for a person to lose their memory surrounding the treatments and perhaps some before or after the event, but that the memories would return in time when treatments ceased. My memories have yet to return. Lost are not only the memories around the treatments but also almost all memories from the beginning of my first psychiatric hospitalization up until I began to reduce the number and dosage of psychiatric drugs I was taking. It was only after I nearly had a heart attack and lost most of my bladder control that I began rethinking what I was allowing to happen to myself. I got a new internist, a new psychiatrist, and a therapist who knew what I was going through.

After my odyssey with the psychiatric system began I could no longer think for myself. My family had to care for me and I could no longer drive. Even when I went to familiar places alone I got lost. Driving was impossible, I lost my job and vocation, and I had to go on disability and medicare.

My recovery is finally underway. I have a good psychiatrist and an even better therapist. With their help I am now off of most of my medications and am thinking for and taking care of myself. I now live in my own apartment alone for the first time in a while. I can read the bus schedule and ride the city bus places without becoming lost. In therapy I am working out the problems that caused my issues in the first place. If there is one bit of wisdom I can impart it is this: do not accept what is told to you by any member of the medical society without thinking for yourself and doing your own research about the medicines and treatments they recommend to you. You can say no! Don't feel bad if you and your doctor(s) are not a good fit; just find another one. Keep searching until you find helpers who are good for you, and a plan that really works.

by Evelyn Scogin

Note: Evelyn testified to the Austin City Council on April 3, 2007.