

Mental Illness



Last week, I served on a Jury for an 18 year old boy who is charged with 4 major felonies that are all some variation of attempted murder. His name is Edward Ji and he lived in Frisco. The issue before us was whether or not Edward was competent to stand trial on the felony charges. It took very little time for us to find that he was in fact, competent. Our requirements were to determine that he 1.) understood the charges against him and 2.) could help his attorney with his defense. He was found capable of both within less than 30 minutes. I was the jury foreperson, so when the Judge questioned me in court about our findings, I faced both he and this young boy and answered that we had indeed reached a unanimous verdict. Edward was sitting in his chair with ankles shackled in his prison garb. When the judge read our verdict, Edward gave an approving nod as if to thank me and smiled at me as he looked over the top of his glasses that were sliding down his nose. He was quite happy with the verdict. During this trial, we learned some sad things about this boy.

It turned out that he had a fascination with serial killers and had aspirations to join their ranks. He told one Doctor that he hoped to collect the hands of his victims and keep them in jars of alcohol. He wanted to be famous for killing and admired several notorious killers.



In 2006, Edward found the courage to attempt his first act of violence. He was a 10th grader who was 16 years old at the time of his crime. His first attempt at killing failed as he took aim at a man, out walking his dog. He missed. Within a few days, he found the courage to try again. This time, he randomly picked a house and determined to knock on the

door and kill whoever answered it. The unsuspecting young boy who opened the door was 14 years old. Thankfully, after many days in the hospital near death, he survived the two gunshot wounds to his chest.

Within days, Edward was arrested and through a series of legal maneuvers, has now spent close to 2 years in the Collin County Jail awaiting trial. Our jury removed the last barrier to his being tried on felony charges by the end of this year.

I was sad when I watched Edward's mother weep, barely able to testify. She spoke through a Mandarin interpreter and it was clear that she knew something was wrong with her son. Physically, Edward was somewhat frail but his cockiness demonstrated his desire to be taken serious. He spoke out in the courtroom several times against the warnings of his attorney and was completely unmoved by the testimonies given by his parents.

Edward, is determined to act as his own counsel and made it clear to professionals, that he had no desire to avoid prosecution. He even sarcastically boasted to one Doctor about prison being his retirement home. He is fully aware that he could spend most of, if not the rest of, his life in prison. Yet, he smiled.

As I sat in the courtroom watching, I knew the pain of his family all too personally. The odd behavior of this boy and the circumstances he was facing were like a reflection into my own past. You see, Edward is very much like my own father.



My father too is mentally ill. My father too committed a violent criminal act when in a jealous rage, he attempted to kill someone and returned fire with the police when they tried to intervene. My dad is in prison now on 3 charges of attempted capital murder, 2 of those are against police officers. At the time of his arrest, he had more than 100 rounds in his pocket.

Edward is diagnosed with Psychotic, Bi Polar and Schizoid behavior, as well as personality disorders such as Narcissism, Depression, Social Anxiety and Sociopathic traits. Though Edward's acts were driven by psychosis and were more pronounced than my dad's, their Narcissistic traits of arrogance and charm were shockingly similar. My father is Bi Polar with social and personality disorders such as Depression, Narcissism, and Sociopathic traits. My father's Psychosis is showing up more and more these past few years in the form of paranoia and his rewriting stories of his life with more palatable versions in which HE is the victim. By

the time my dad actually went to trial, he had convinced himself that he had been framed by the police.

Edward has chosen NOT to launch a defense but instead, he wants to act as his own counsel and see if he can beat the system. If he fails and is incarcerated, I have no doubt that he, like my dad, will blame someone else for the outcome. When my dad was arrested, he was sure he could charm his jury. He was certain that the police would help him because he was cooperative. He chose to testify and he was 100% certain he would be released. In prison, he boasted year after year of his imminent parole, but I learned through the Parole Board that he would never be eligible for parole due to his bad behavior. The irrationality of it was outlandish to me, but to my father it was real and no one could convince him otherwise. Since then, his stories have become more and more outrageous, until I ultimately had to sever contact with him.

My dad will be released next year. Not paroled, but released. His time will have been fully served. It frightens me to think about having to deal with his craziness in my life again and though I have severed the relationship, I still somehow know I will stand face to face with my dad again.

I'm not sure why I wrote this entry, but perhaps for me it is cathartic. It is a part of my life that has certainly helped me become who I am today albeit a painful journey. Though I live my life with no regrets, I would certainly have written these chapters of my life differently if I could. I am still processing this experience with Edward Ji but I would like to think that perhaps God put me on his jury for a reason. Maybe I was there to be reminded of the truth about mental illness so that I don't doubt my choices with regard to my dad. Perhaps seeing the reflection of my father in Edward was so that I would recall the irrational thinking that is steadfast with people who suffer this type of mental illness. Perhaps its purpose was to bring back the memories of all the times I tried to explain the truth to my dad only to get back a response full of distorted theories that could take on new paranoia and conspiracies with each conversation.

If you are dealing with any social disorders or mental illness, whether a friend, relative or yourself, I encourage you to seek the help of a professional. These disorders vary from fully functional every day people to the more severe types as I have written about today. It's critical to get the help of a proper professional. For any conditions involving the need for prescription drugs, it is imperative that you seek the advice of a Psychiatrist as they are the highest qualified professionals in such treatment.

I encourage you not to be afraid to take that step. Edward could easily have joined the ranks of his serial killing heroes right here close to our homes. He was gaining the courage to execute his murderous plan when through luck and perfect timing, he was apprehended. Edward Ji's parents were cautioned by his teacher's and counselor's that he needed help. His mother made him an appointment once but cancelled it. He never got the help he needed.

Perhaps you're thinking: this is an awful topic Dana and certainly not fun to think about. Unfortunately, in my life, it has been an unavoidable chapter. Sadly, millions of other Americans can relate to my situation, which is why I write about it. This site is DanaHamman.com so it makes sense for me to share it here. It is, afterall, the only life I have! Stick with me! More good stuff to come!

If you're interested, here is the story about the trial: <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/092608dnmetcocompetencyhearing.af739c28.html>