

I have really appreciated the opportunity to come across the border to share my story. It is not guaranteed that I would make it over the border because when I was asked why I was crossing the border I told them that I was presenting at a conference, then a mental health conference. Eventually the questions stopped and he let me pass through. I do not think as I often do that I would be so scared traveling if I was disabled like my wife- physically.

By now I should have been a full professor somewhere teaching geography at a college or a university. Before I became ill with schizophrenia at the age of 30 I had completed three degrees and had some material published and been a field member on a meteorite recovery expedition on the Antarctic polar plateau near the South Pole on the same glacier Scott ascended to on his ill fated expedition to the South Pole. I came back with frostbite a severe frostbite and nerve damage and unseen damage to my psyche and mind. Likely 5 years later I would be diagnosed with schizophrenia.

I of course knew what that word meant. My mother was diagnosed with Schizophrenia when I was just 5 years old. We were “That” family with the sick mom. As it turns out, perhaps that was actually a blessing for my life. I’m convinced I have never gone off my medication in part because I saw what that did to my mother. I’m sure it also helped that I was older when I had my first psychotic break. I had an extra decade’s worth of education and life experience to draw upon to aid in my recovery.

Even so, on the old first generation medications, I just existed. My world wasn’t much larger than my small basement apartment. When the atypical medications came on the market, my world expanded dramatically. I began to volunteer. It got me out of the house, and out of myself. Even if I couldn’t hold a full time job, I could once again become a contributing member of society. The interaction aided my cognitive abilities to the point I was able to return somewhat to my academic pursuits. I couldn’t do field work, but could do research and write short academic

papers. Being able to present research papers at conferences again gave me some of my lost self esteem back.

I give a lot of these presentations jointly with my wife in Canada. She was unable to be here today because she really hates to fly. I find that while people find my story interesting, they seem more fascinated with the woman who married me for some reason. While she has a disability it is physical her barriers which exist are different.

In the beginning, I was afraid to tell her that I had Schizophrenia. I knew from past experience that word often sends people running. I've had research partners cut off communication with me when they found out, and women, don't get me started on those stories. When I finally got up the courage to tell her, her only comment was, "that's interesting, so what?" I assumed that she simply didn't understand what the word meant. I had no way of knowing at the time that she had vast experience in dealing with those with serious mental illnesses in her legal practice. We met through a Catholic web site called Ave Maria

she actually selected my bio from hundreds and there is a fascinating story behind it. Catherine was living in florida as a foster mother to a friend and her family and she wanted to see after a life of being single she wanted to see if there was someone for her. Around Christmas of 2004 she took her roommate Arlene a rapid cycling bipolar to see her doctor and while waiting outside Arlene brought her a copy of *Schizophrenia Digest* from the waiting room and showed her a copy with an article about Aldridge a football player that had had schizophrenia. Across the page was an article I had written on being single and having schizophrenia and how I wanted a girlfriend. The photo was the same photo that I had used for Ave Maria. She forgot about the article but somehow unconsciously remembered the photograph and was attracted to it. She only discovered this when she read some of my old articles later on when we were engaged. I like to tell that story because it is such a story of hope of two damaged individuals finding each other.

She has this natural ability to separate a person from their illness. When I have break through symptoms and think that the TV is talking to me, she very calmly tells me that maybe it is time to turn it off. She says the same thing when I think CSIS or the RCMP is listening to my phonecalls. Although to be honest if they are going to spy on someone they would likely spy on someone with the Order of Canada. She will tell you that she didn't purposely go looking for someone with schizophrenia to marry. It's just that she had so much personal experience with us that when I came along, she wasn't immediately afraid.

In my recovery the biggest helps and hindrances have been relationships. I believe that I could have been sick for some time, but breaking up with my girl friend was the final stressor that caused my first psychotic break. My father helped me when I was first diagnosed understand the need to take the medication. I'd never had good social skills probably due to prodromal symptoms.

I serve on a provincial disability government board with many other disabled members- the premiers council on the status of persons with disabilities. Two of the men in wheelchairs are married to women who previously worked in rehab facilities. Neither of them expected to marry someone who was severely disabled, but again because of their experience, they knew what a marriage to someone who was blind or quadriplegic would entail and weren't immediately scared away when they met their husbands.

My first wife had a serious mental illness. We could have been support for each other to work towards a healthier future. As they say though, it takes two to tango. She ended up completely lost and chose homelessness in Hong Kong over our relationship. The loss of that relationship harmed my recovery in a thousand ways.

Sadly, not everyone can do that. When someone is first diagnosed with schizophrenia, often their best support is their family. That doesn't mean though that you won't face stigma at

the hands of your friends and family. My wife's family was so upset at her marrying me, that her mother told everyone to boycott it. She actually received wedding announcements back from a brother "return to sender." She didn't receive a single wedding present from her family. Her mother started to warm up to me later after I won the Order of Canada. She got very excited and warmed to me when she was told that the governor general is the Queen's personal representative for Canada. The equivalent American award to the Order of Canada would be the Presidential Medal of Freedom or the British knighthood..

In my mother-in-law's case, she had some reason to fear for her daughter. Her first husband was diagnosed with schizophrenia serving during the Korean War also after suffering as a Japanese POW. This was a time before any real treatment for the illness. He threw her out of a moving car while she was 6 month's pregnant. I can understand her fear for her daughter. Eventually, I guess she figured that if the Mounties would let me in the same room as the Governor General of Canada, that I must

be okay after all and has changed her opinion of me. At the ceremony the Mountie guards did keep an eye on me and when going up to receive the medal I was afraid I would get trip, throw up on her shoes and then get cermoneously get tasered.

Afterwards, Molson of Molson beer who was next to me said he was also afraid although I don't think he was afraid of getting tasered. He might have been sampling his own product beforehand. The next morning I woke up with Catherine and threw up promptly due to the stress of the previous day.

It is ironic that my family also did not receive Catherine well also.

In Canada we have programs for tax credits and matching funds for retirement accounts based on disability, and I had to fight for both. Something that might mean an extra hundred dollars a month seems like pocket change to a doctor, and may not be worth his time to fill out the forms on your behalf. On the other hand, to someone on a small fixed income, that's a lot of money. I'm lucky to have both a personal physician and

psychiatrist who will work with me on what I need. They may not understand why it is so important to me, but they are willing to help. That's not the case for everyone. I have friends who have been waiting over two years for the paperwork they need for certain government programs. That's inexcusable. Something my wife has to remind me is that doctors are just our employees. If they won't fulfill their duties to you, fire them, and find a doctor who will.

When I talk to my friends, most of whom have schizophrenia or other serious mental illnesses, the main thing they talk about is women and relationships. When my wife and I give speeches to parent groups, something that happens every single time, is she gets swarmed after the meeting by parents wanting to know how to get girlfriends for their sons.

Above all else, schizophrenia can be separating. It grabs us right out of school and jobs and away from our friends. They go on without us most of the time. It can even separate us from our families, especially if we come from a culture where mental illness

is viewed as a dishonor or an embarrassment. Siblings can feel that you are getting the most attention, or can be afraid. The relationships we have, or form after becoming sick, can be so crucial to our long term stability with this disease. When I was first diagnosed, the doctor told me that my life was basically over. That the meds would shorten my life substantially, and that I would get cirrhosis of the liver by the time I was this age. Not terribly helpful. For some reason that I can't explain, I never gave up hope. I never gave up the hope of finding someone to share my life with. I never gave up hope of having my own home. I never gave up hope of being able to contribute to society. That hope kept me fighting. It kept me on my meds, it gave me a reason to get up in the morning.

When Catherine first came to visit in Edmonton, I proceeded to spend the next several weeks introducing her to all my friends. So many of them asked her if she had Schizophrenia that, she began introducing herself by saying, "no I don't have Schizophrenia, but I have fallen on my head." Months after we

married, we discovered that those who didn't ask her if she had Schizophrenia, had just assumed she did, and were shocked to find out otherwise.

Had I been deaf or blind or in a wheelchair, I don't think people would have had the same reaction. They wouldn't have assumed that she had to be deaf or blind in order to marry me. For those of us with schizophrenia, people just assume that we are so damaged that a normal person wouldn't want to marry us. I even believed that for a long time. Some of my friends disappeared from my life because she came into it. I can only guess that she represented for them something they didn't think they could ever have, and found it too difficult to be around us. So you can see, stigma takes many guises, and rears its head when we are least expecting it.

I have been "blessed" with symptoms that include all 5 of my senses, not just the most common auditory ones. One big advantage to being in a relationship is that I can have constant reality checks. A couple of years ago one of our neighbors who

drinks a tad too much went to sleep with his friend Jack – Jack Daneils with a hot dog on the stove. A couple of hours later, the condo apartment building was full of smoke. Loud clanking fire alarms and firemen at the door in full respirators isn't something anyone wants to wake up to.

Ever since, I routinely think I smell smoke. If I lived by myself, and smelled smoke, I would become scared, and probably panic. Instead, I can turn to my wife and ask her if she smells smoke. She'll remind me that the alarms are silent, and then say that she doesn't smell anything. It allows me to understand it is a hallucination so I can relax. I'll occasionally see something like a stray cat in the house, and she'll remind me we don't have a cat. One day, I saw a mouse, and she said not to worry, that we didn't have any mice. Two weeks later when she actually saw the mouse, I did have a bit of fun at her expense. Now if I was to have seen the mouse flying I don't think I would have to ask her. Freud talked about 'reality checks' in a similar vein.

Relationships are just so important for us, and this illness actually makes them harder to start or sustain. I've never been able to read body language or understand someone hinting something at me. That can make the playground a minefield. Add on top of the positive and negative symptoms of this illness, and meeting people, making friends, can be so difficult. However, we have to try, and keep trying.

I've said many times that if a major soap opera or sit-com on TV had a character with schizophrenia, perhaps people would be less afraid of us. Similar to the positive effect that Kramer had as a character based on someone with bipolar has had on the show Seinfeld.

I know that we are much more likely to be a victim of crime or hurt ourselves than we are to hurt anyone else, but when one of us does act out violently, it usually ends up on the front page of the paper. I know that immediately after something happens that my phone will start ringing off the hook with reporters calling for

comments. We have to overcome our fears and be as public as we can be.

I was a member of my church for 5 years before I got married, and barely knew anyone. After Catherine hit town, now everyone in church knows my name. It's because she drags me to hospitality and to fundraisers. I've gotten to know people who aren't ill. More importantly, they have gotten to know me. The next time they see a bad portrayal of someone with schizophrenia on TV, they can say to themselves that it the exception. The best way we can overcome fear of our disease is to come out of the closet and let people know who we are, what we are about, so that discrimination can come off a layer at a time.

I was the first person with schizophrenia to be awarded the Order of Canada over its 40 year history. One of lifes ironies is that I would without my disability have made an impact on Canadian society the way I have with my disability. Out of what has been my greatest shame and tragedy has come my greatest adulation and success. I have not been recognized for what I am

most proud of my research except from a narrow band of brother researchers with membership in the Explorers Club and the International Academy of Astronautics- but for my greatest failings. I hope I'm not the last to receive the Order of Canada from my group. With new classes of medications and the potential of targeted gene viral therapies to repair the brain maybe real treatments will arise for these illnesses. I hope that in my lifetime I will see someone with schizophrenia receive an Oscar, become a US Senator, become President of Microsoft, or maybe walk on the Moon. I found a piece of the Moon near the South Pole looking for meteorites including lunar one that I still visit in my dreams on the frozen seas beyond the South Pole. Thank you.