*SOME POSSIBILITIES THAT YOUR LIFE MAY HOLD TODAY AS*

*A MENTAL PATIENT – AND SOME POSSIBILITIES AHEAD*

by Fred Chaney

The following manuscript by Fred Chaney is addressed to the patients at the Mississippi State Hospital providing hope to those who are suffering from mental illnesses and the advances of medicine and therapies to restore sanity. This undated manuscript was located in the Brodie Crump Family Papers at Mississippi State University’s Special Collections Department. The document has not been edited.

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 *We too often – as patients at a mental hospital – think of our lives being empty, purposeless and without meaning. In despair some of us may have come to believe at times that it might have been better had we not lived at all.*

 *I know that I have often thought this and I have often wondered how a God that in my youth I was taught was a God of Love and mercy – how such a good God could allow such grieveous troubles to come into human lives as mental affliction.*

 *But always when tormented by this sort of doubting and feelings of personal uselessness and waste I have tried to console myself and lighten the picture of darkness there by remembering two bits of classic wisdom that were also early taught to me –*

 *About the personal meaninglessness of my life as a mental patient I have remembered the saying – “They serve also who only stand and wait”[[1]](#endnote-1)*

 *And about the idea of God’s part in any of this I have recalled the quotation – “All things work together for His greater glory”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

 *But it was always hard to see how these things could be really true and through the years of my life as a patient they remained mostly words and thought that I hoped were true of life and about God. But not much more than hope was there to be felt or seen.*

 *Today because I think I have glimpsed something more related to these things I have wanted to write about it – to tell what it is and what meaning it takes for me – what meaning I think is there for us all perhaps – as mental patients.*

 *This new angle of light comes for me in a recently read report showing that for the first time since they were allies in the war (1941-45) against Hitlerism some of Russia’s scientific know-how is now offered as free aid to those beyond the barriers of the Iron Curtain in the search for solution to a problem of increasing seriousness for the people of East and West alike – mental illness.*

 *Delos Smith (United Press Science Editor)[[3]](#endnote-3) recently wrote – “For whatever it may mean to future relations between the scientists of Soviet Russia and those of the West Dr. O.V. Kerkikov (director of Russia’s foremost psychiatric clinic) has contributed an article to “The Lancet”, British Medical Journal with a world wide circulation.*

 *“Russian contributions to Western journals have been non-existant for years now. Just the fact of it’s publication was enough to stir great interest in medical, scientific and even political circles in many places. But it’s contents had fascination, too, because it revealed that (quoting Dr. Kerkikov) – ‘intermittent deep sleep lasting 10 to 20 hours daily is in wide-spread use in Russia for treatment of many kinds of serious mental disorders. The patients are made to sleep with a wide variety of sedatives – a particular sleeping potion being chosen to fit the needs of each patient.*

 *“As for the Russian doctor’s results (continues the United Press Science Editor) – “Dr. Kerkikov makes no sweeping claims. There comes no permanent cures from the sleep therapy alone – but there have come many many cures that seem to be permanent after the rested mind of the patient has been able to respond – where before it could not – to such further treatments as shock—psycho-analysis, group recreational and occupational interests ect. – “At the conclusion of his significant article in the British medical journal Dr. Kerkikov proposes that a world-wide conference of leading authorities be held in recognition of the size of the mental health problem, and in the hope of finding more effective methods of research, of prevention, of treatment and of rehabilitation.[[4]](#endnote-4)*

 *I cite this report thinking that if by any chance this journalistic event is followed by some sort of international cooperative effort against mental disease (apparently as alarming in it’s increase and consequences to Russia’s well-being as a healthy nation – as anywhere else) then the way may have been opened, too, for further unified work upon the solution of other common difficulties and on into the demonstrated ability of peaceful coexistence and mutually helpful living for the peoples of Russia and for ourselves.*

 *This, of course, is a King-size projection for the possibilities that can be hoped for starting with Dr. Kerkikov’s breach of the long-held Russian attitude of isolation, with-drawal and hostility (as contrasted with the reasonableness and helpfulness that the gesture made by Russia’s leading medical authority stands for)*

 *It is time indeed that something different—something better and more promising come to relieve the sense of waiting doom and hopelessness so long oppressing the consciousness of the world because of the uncompromising, unyielding attitude of Russia.*

 *If all of that at long last is beginning to take a different turn – if real significance can be read into this precedent-shattering gesture of good will and helpful information given out about the mentally sick of that walled-around country by one of it’s finest medical minds might not the imagination fired by this happy event leap on enlarging the wonderful possibilities – seeing the paradox of our ultra scientific century as a period where confusions and problems have so multiplied as to have led all humanity to the brink of ruin but finally being withheld from that by in a last effort of unity made in behalf of the mentally stricken – and in the end never taking that final plunge into Chaos and Hell at all – but finding it’s own way back to sanity and peace and the universally needed humanism of ‘live and let live’ – or more, of ‘live and HELP live.’*

 *They serve also who only stand and wait” –“All things work together for His greater glory”. Who has not wondered how this might be if he is a mental patient? Yet who has not seen how in spite of the heartache and isolation of our lives – the seeming meaninglessness that so much kindness and goodness is still there. Who does not know who has lived with the mentally ill for long that they are, as a whole, perhaps the world’s most responsive people to any acts of humanity and consideration since they can demand and receive so much less from life (until mental health is restored) than others?*

 *Looking back across the years I’ve spent here I believe that I have been surrounded by as good people as there are anywhere no matter what the lacks are of possession, achievement or success measured by the yardstick of earthly gains. So many people whose hearts are pure and unselfish with these qualities plain in the way they carry on through each separate day – often with so little in view – so little reward for their gallantry and courage except the appreciation and understanding of those here whose lives are interwoven with theirs. So many people in this population who must remain very dear to God and certain of Heaven.*

 *Knowing this to be deeply true – and seeing now the possibility for change and good that can come from the finding of some common ground of understanding and mutual helpfulness between the war-ready tragically divided peoples of this time in human history may it not be more than merely wishful thinking that in identifying the seeming purposelessness and uselessness of the lives of the mentally handicapped and ill with such possibilities long obscured meanings are becoming revealed.*

 *How did mental sickness (insanity) first begin? WHY? and why has it gradually increased and lately so greatly increased until here in the AGE OF ANXIETY AND FEAR it has become the affliction of mankind.*

 *God must have placed in the meaning of human mental affliction something beyond the waste, the emptiness and the individual suffering that is there –Could it be that some of the answers to the possible meaning of this is now becoming historically revealed?*

 *At least the signs seem to be there.*

 *Should the lives of the mentally ill serve this way –helping toward the bringing of Peace to an apparently war-doomed atomic age—helping toward removing the danger and likelihood of humanity’s end in suicide –then, having served that great historic purpose – might not mental illness itself cease to be?*

 *This question belongs in the visualization of the whole picture that becomes out-lined now for THAT possibility, too, has become today more than a mere expression of great hoping.*

 *During Mental Health Week discussions recently seen on TV several of America’s best known psychiatrists agreed that although the number of mental patients in the country amounts to more than all other illnesses combined that because of the gathering effort now being brought to bear against all phases of this staggering health problem that in foreseeable time ahead – one said less than twenty years, one said within ten – that the ways of preventing mental sickness and the ways of maintain good health of mind and emotions (a balanced mentality) would be so well known – these factors PLUS the increased ability to recognize the earliest symptoms of the onset of serious mental conditions – all these factors working together would combine (they agreed) to make mental institutions relics of a past age.*

 *In other words that the generation now in school will raise it’s own children in a world where the fear of insanity hardly EXISTS:*

 *Whether you wish to follow along on such a perspective of possibilities – until more solid evidence is in—you can be certain that any day in this period of scientific wonders and miracles – some new therapy may be developed that will reverse the trend of increase of psychotic sicknesses.*

 *For even today as more has been learned about the chemistry of the brain’s structure new medicines have come into being whose benefits seem far greater than any treatments ever tried before – and as more still comes we may witness as dramatic a climax in the field of mental diseases as the discovery of the Salk vaccine (in spite of the early disappointments that it’s mishandling has temporarily brought) means against the prevalance of polio.*

 *A few more years and the conditions of imbalance that reached us may have become shorn of their powers to harm as pneumonia usually is (following the creation of the sulfa drugs) or as diabetes usually is (with the powers of counter-action against it’s results that diabetics now have through use of insulin) Perhaps in that time—or less time—mental illness will have become as totally conquered as malaria, rabies, diphtheria, scarlet fever – as as the long war now seems to find victory in sight there, too—polio.*

 *Victory still remains to be won against cancer, heart disease and tuberculosis. But so much new ground has been gained in the face of the continuing threat of these terrible things that today we know that it is only a matter of shortening time until scientific research and new knowledge will bring far-reaching changes for the better to those whose lives are now endangered by these destroyers.*

 *The effectiveness with which the million-numbered alcoholics have found relief or complete cure for themselves in the light of today’s psychiatric truths becomes part of the picture of widening possibilities ahead for the mentally sick—as well.*

 *So that without any projection of possibilities whatsoever—without any effort of thought trying to fit the pattern of our lives into Divine or historical plan we can nevertheless all unite in agreement that because of the realities of these triumphs over so many classic afflictions of mankind we are all witnesses of the emergence of a new age of performed miracles of medical benefits.*

 *In the limitless promises that seem to be directly ahead verging even now on fulfillment you may write your own ticket.*

 *Perhaps you see this statement of my own as a subject of vain imaginings – an effort to identify and explain the existence of so much mental illness in our century with the ultimate purpose of God – and seeing it, too, as being (perhaps) in the services of Peace for the hurt imperiled world of mankind – and this kind of interpretation of possible meanings that lives like our own might have THAT WAY.*

 *You might not be able, therefore, to accept it – like that. But if not at least you can be comforted and consoled (as a hospital patient in a mental institution) because of the miracles that have already come to pass within your own life span that there is much greater hope today than there has ever been for your personal recovery and restoration.*

 *Because the chances for that are much more than possibilities as it is a certainty that today and in the future you will find greater and greater help toward health and a satisfactory measure of happiness.*

 *And with the inevitability of war fading and the destructiveness of disease fading the time ahead in this century of unsurpassed violence and danger to body and mind is quickly turning into the sun-lit levels of it’s REAL possibilities – as the healthiest, happiest and most peaceful the world has ever known.*

 *I believe this as the already arrived at truth of our times – with that truth growing plainer and plainer about that and I believe in the good and the purpose and the plan in Good of every one of our lives as I never believed before.[[5]](#endnote-5)*

 *Fred Chaney*

1. James Milton’s “Trinity Manuscript” states “They also serve who only stand and wait.” On Milton’s blindness he was saying that he has a place in God’s world despite his disability. Chaney made changes to this quotation. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The King James Bible states “and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Biblehub.com. Chaney made changes to this quotation. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kathy Hanks, *The Hutchinson* News, Kansas, Sept. 5, 2017. Delos Smith was the science editor for the United Press International but was also an actor, producer and director of plays on Broadway and London. He acted in the role of Scanlon in the movie “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” It is ironic that Smith played a role as a mental patient in a mental hospital. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. O.V. Kerbikov [1907-1965] article in The Lancet, April 9, 1955, was titled “Treatment of Mental Disease by Sleep.” A joint session of Russian psychiatrist was held in October 1951 and was a “precursor of later abuses in psychiatry in the U.S.S.R. Other psychiatrist were accused of practicing anti-Pavlovian and Anti-Marxist, idealistic, reactionary science damaging for soviet psychiatry.” Kerbikov served the role as an inquisitors. Helen Lavretsky, “The Russian Concept of Schizophrenia: A Review of the Literature,” Schizophrenia Bulletin, Vol. 24, no 4, 1998. The source to Delos Smith’s quotes has not been located. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Fred Chaney, Undated manuscript, Box 1, Folder 18, 1955-1956, MSS 654, Brodie S. Crump Family Papers, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Libraries. Used by permission from MSU. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)