



David Reville, 1965

# BEDLAM DIARY

In October 1965, 22-year-old **David Reville**, diagnosed as having a personality disorder, was involuntarily committed to Kingston Psychiatric Hospital. Today Reville is MPP for Riverdale, and his harrowing hospital diary, excerpted below, is the centrepiece of **Shrink Resistant**, a groundbreaking anthology by psychiatric survivors.

By **DAVID REVILLE**

*Jan. 10/66:* The medical heads have bobbed and nodded. The shrink has pursed his lips. The psychologist has drummed his fingers. The sociologist has clicked her tongue. The expert opinion drops out like a great fart. My marriage has something to do with my problems. Bravo, you silly bastards! For this you need 400 years of university? Carol has been asked to cool it for six months — no letters, no visits, no phone calls, no cigarettes, magazines, chewing gum, zip.

What am I supposed to think about that?

They're going to keep me for six months.

They better not count on it.

*Jan. 18:* I've been transferred off the admitting ward. What's the strategy, fellas? How's a stay on the alcoholic ward supposed to work?

There are no nurses on this ward. And I'm already weary of the bottle-by-bottle histories. It's time to light out for the territory.

*Jan. 22:* What kind of a crummy joint is this? Can't anybody do anything right? There I was, an obviously dangerous lunatic, fixing to escape, and no one does anything. I didn't have to gnaw my way through three feet of concrete, fight off seven burly guards with staves, crawl through a fetid sewer. I just walked out the door when we went down to the cafeteria for supper....

## No manacles

I turned myself in. They acted nonchalant about it, of course, like it was no big thing, and one cop tried to pretend he'd never heard of me. It's hard to get credit. But I did get a ride back with the provincial bailiff under the heavy guard of a matron. They left the manacles off because I was playing it smart and going quietly.

So here I sit, outside the doctor's office, waiting. I was told to be here at 9:00 and it's now 11:45. This must be a lesson of some kind.

*Jan. 23:* I sat until 4:00 when Dr. Powell came out, said good-night and kept on going. Shit, I wish I hadn't looked so surprised. I'll have to get used to the games they play around here.

Later... oh, yeah, here it comes. My clothes just left the ward. I'll probably find out where they went because it seems reasonable to think that I'll be joining them. Or does it? Maybe Powell's wife is head of the Rummage Committee.

Punishment isn't called punish-

ment, of course, but it operates just like you'd expect, the restriction of liberty in some kind of relation to the severity of the offence. It almost always starts with a demotion in Grouping. Now, Grouping is the status structure of the patients. Group 1 means you remain on the ward, probably in pyjamas. Group 2 entitles you to get dressed (yippee) and move around the hospital accompanied by an attendant. You might even get to work on a work gang or go to the occupational therapy workshop. On Group 3 you can walk around the building unaccompanied, and Group 4 opens the grounds to you. At opposite ends of the scale are "Special Observa-

tion" — you are watched more or less carefully after a suicide attempt — and "Town Parole," an instructive term meaning that you may go into the city. Anyway, for inappropriate behaviour you lose a group or two, returning to pyjamas for particularly heinous crimes. If you are really beyond the pale, you are put beyond the pale into the Old Hospital, Rockwood, Home of the Chronic and Defective. And if, somehow, there are no rummage sales tomorrow, that must be where I'm going.

I have made a decision to be Quiet and Cooperative. Not that I'm looking forward to Rockwood. Actually, I'm scared to death. It's

just that I've seen the early results of non-cooperation and I don't think that my case history would be greatly improved by the inclusion of a brief medical report reciting the contusions, abrasions, fractures and concussions sustained resisting transfer.

So I think I'll just plaster a smile on my face and sit here clutching my exercise book and wait.

Sid approaches me; half-apologetic, he says that we're taking a walk. I receive a faint message that Sid isn't happy either, probably because I'm bigger than he is. Then I realize that it's not very flattering — where are the heavies? But I get off that track quickly because I know the heavies will appear magically at the slightest possibility that they're needed. So Sid and I walk to the elevator, ride down one floor and walk out the way I came in, out the door, down the road about a quarter of a mile to Rockwood, the charming grey limestone edifice. We climb the four flights of stairs to Ward Eight. A face appears at the little window in the door.

I walk past a long row of beds and into a large square room. The place smells strongly of urine. Sid and my file, considerably fatter now, go into a little office and I wait indecisively at the door. I look around.

## Stoic stares

In the room are about 50 men, most of whom are busy with various occupations — dozing, mumbling, sucking their toothless mouths in and out, and staring in a variety of attitudes: wistfully, stoically, blankly, demonically. I see a vacant chair and sit in it gingerly and try to see parallels between Ward Eight and the old folks' home Grandpa spent his last years in. This place is an example of the newness of psychiatry. Or maybe it's a tasteless joke from some arrogant Olympian or other.

A wheelchair hurtles by, a Down's syndrome patient at the helm, chanting "dirty piss, dirty bitch" as his contribution to the noise level. He rolls huge, liquid eyes and looks over at me, smiling long strings of saliva. I smile back tentatively and he lolls a huge, shiny, bulbous head with its fantastic railway map of scars. Over there, an ancient relic, dapper in collar and tie, rubs his bald dome, meticulously accounting for each rub — "five, six, seven, ai-um."

It's a gruesome, pathetic cata-

logue. Mind-boggling. It's a macabre parade, the ravages of syphilis, of time, of inhumanity, of plain stupidity. There is a neat little man in another corner, praying. To what God? Lights begin to flash behind my eyes. Too much input: overload, overload, I'm shorting out.

A wall-eyed man beckons to me. "C'mere," he rasps, and I realize with one of those terrible jolts of comprehension that this is the ward supervisor. I wonder briefly if he's been given the job after 40 years'

"I have to run the risk of being thought mad in order to keep from going mad."

faithful service as a patient. That's the last wondering I do that day. I turn off completely, unable to absorb further jolts. It's some time before I return to conjecture — it's not happening, this is a hallucination (maybe I am crazy), I'm tripping out on something, it's a Rod Serling/Vincent Price low-budget 3-D reject. But now there is a heavy steel bolt through my temple expanding and contracting, driving sharp spikes deep into my head and I'm grateful that I can get lost in the pain until I eventually lose consciousness.

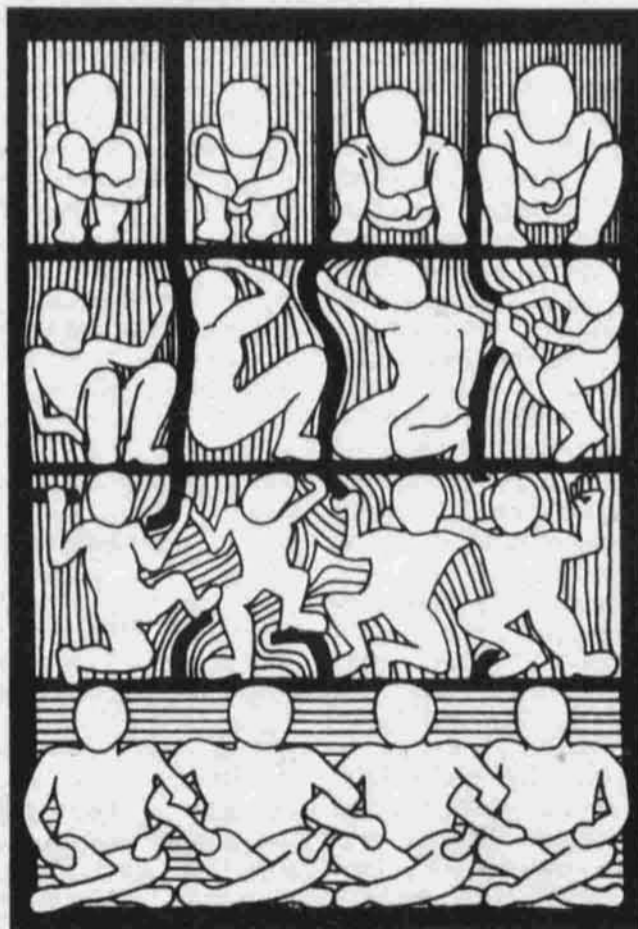
When I peer out through trembling eyelids I can make out three figures around the end of my bed. A deep but female voice says, "You'd better watch this one — suicidal." Then they move away and I hear a raucous laugh and a sharp slapping sound. I fall asleep again.

*Jan. 26:* It is incredible how adaptable humans are. In two days I have managed somehow to accommodate myself to this bizarre situation. I've slept, eaten, breathed, shat, and, amazingly, found myself a private enough place to masturbate. What more could I ask for?

Most of my fellow lodgers seem harmless enough, once that leap into the beyond has been made and a place has been found for them.

*David Reville, who represented ward 7 on Toronto city council from 1976 to 1984, has been MPP for Riverdale since 1985. As a member of On Our Own and as the NDP's health critic, Reville is a leading advocate of mental health reform.*

## SHRINK RESISTANT



**Shrink Resistant** (New Star Books, \$11.95) will be launched with a reading by editors **Bonnie Burstow** and **Don Weitz** on Friday (January 27) at **SCM Bookroom**.

Apart from **David Reville**, contributors to this anti-psychiatry anthology include **Roger Caron**, **Susan Musgrave**, **Irit Shimrat**, **Margaret Gibson**, **Vern Harper** and **Carla McCague**.

The reading is at 7:30 pm at **SCM**, 333 Bloor West (979-9624).



Henry, the Wheelchair Driver, is erratic but you can plot his trajectory fairly well. And Austin, the Ritual Dresser, reacts violently only to stares, so I shall note where he is peripherally in the future.

This place is heavily weighted to geriatrics. I don't suppose Henry is very old, being a Down's syndrome sufferer, and Bill, the other Down's patient — he travels on foot, however — and another Billy are maybe 35 and Andre couldn't be more than 18. These ones, Doug the Bear and I are the only ones under what? 70? 80? 115?

### Cure question

What have they got me here for? Am I being deliberately disassociated? Why not the violent ward if they are punishing me? True, I've got to stay put here, the doors are locked, I'm four stories up (and afraid of heights anyway), but how is this sort of place supposed to "cure" me?

Jan. 28: I plucked up the courage to ask the ward supervisor — his name is Peck — when I could see the doctor.

"What do you want to see him for? He's very busy, you know. Can't be everywhere at once, you know."

I said that I knew.

"Well, then," he said, "don't be botherin' me about it. I've got enough to do myself."

"But..." I said.

He turned to me, belligerently. "Listen. I've been readin' your file. Can't keep your fingers off 'em, eh?"

I looked puzzled.

"Aw, don't go playin' the little innocent. Stealin'. That's what you're here for. Well, we'll soon learn you that don't pay, Nossir. No stealin' around here. Or you'll be off to Penetang sure as God made them green apples."

I could see that Mr. Bill Peck and I were going to have a really therapeutic relationship.

Ten minutes later he was back.

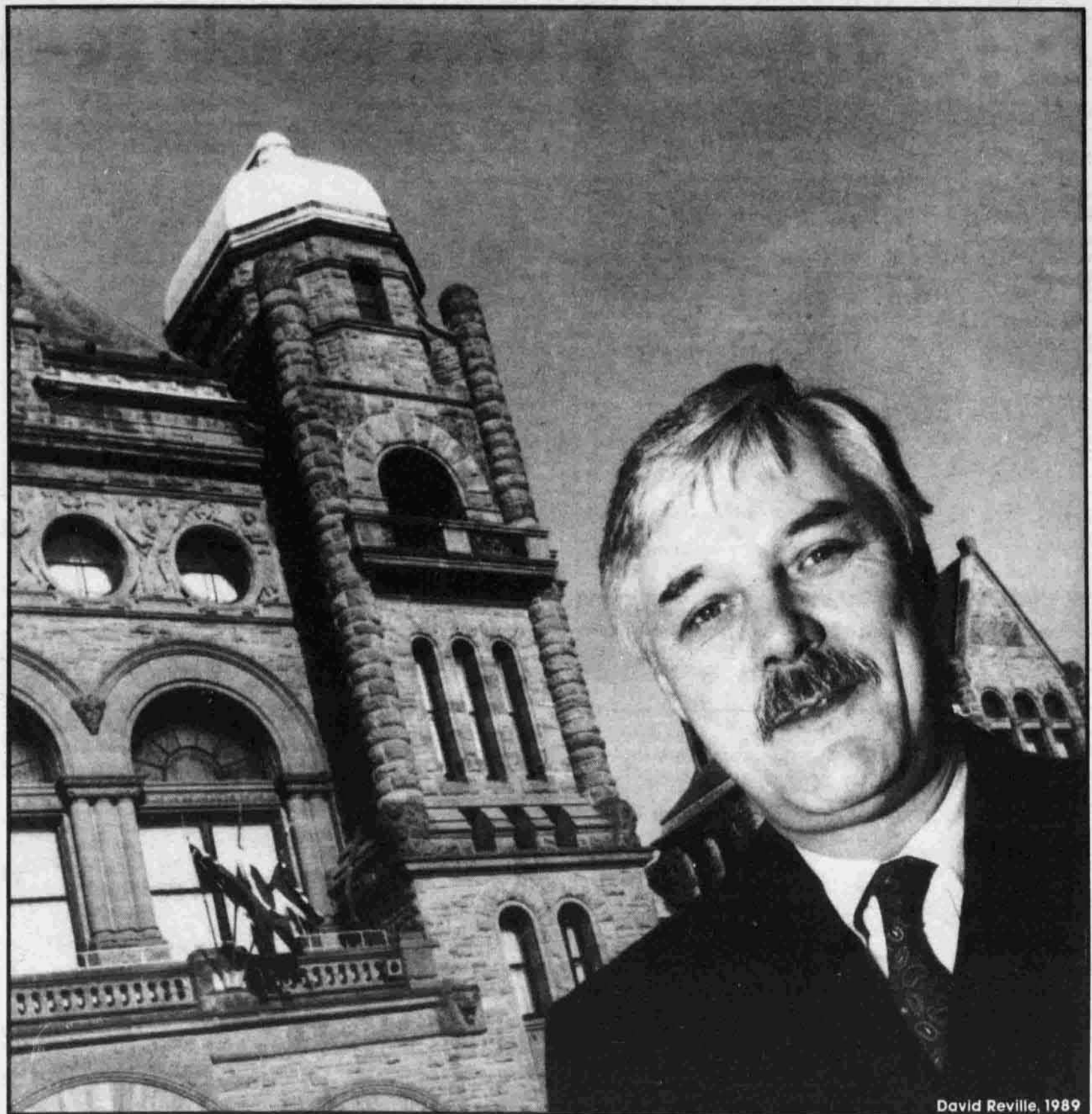
"Dr. Powell comes on the ward at 10:00. I've put you down to see him."

It looks more like a plot every minute.

Dr. Powell was brilliantly unreachable. I asked to be transferred to another ward, any other ward. "Why?" he asked innocently. I explained patiently that I didn't think I could be helped here. "If you want help, you'll get it." And with that reassurance he picked up his telephone and swiveled around in the chair so that his back was to me. And to underscore the absurdity of everything he made a date for a game of golf with Dr. Thingamajig.

Jan. 30: The doctor comes on the ward once a week for an hour. That works out to 1.2 minutes apiece. I wonder where the Department of Health enshrines that statistic.

Feb. 7: I need something to help me handle this place. Powell is turning a deaf ear to my requests for a transfer. He's got some schedule for me that I can't figure out. Peck is hopeless, he's just waiting out his time now and I doubt if he ever knew anything about the human mind. There's no one to talk to — I can't count the absurd dialogues I have with the old boys — nothing to read, and didn't even get the customary (and ridiculous) little wallets to knit. So... I am going to write. I don't care what I write about, I don't care whether it's any



David Reville, 1989

SUSIE KING

good or not, I'm just going to let it come out. I'm going to schedule it, provide my own structure. Fuck them. They're trying to break me. I'm going to do what I can to keep together.

Feb. 10: It's going well. I hunch over a table in the corner and scribble away furiously. I've got a huge callus on my middle finger and I'm building a conviction in Peck's mind that I really am nuts. The poor bastard can barely read, let alone write.

Feb. 13: I am mad and need accept no responsibility for the acts the world does in the name of in-

**"This hospital is filled with poor people. The middle-class contingent could meet comfortably in a phone booth."**

sanity. (Pompous epigrams have a certain charm, though probably mostly for the epigrammist.)

Reluctant to hide my light under a bushel, I tried the above out on Peck. He just stared at me and, for once, both his eyes looked in the same direction.

I have to run the risk of being thought mad in order to keep from going mad. This place is intolerable. Dominic sits in his chair and goes "five, six, seven, ai-um!" for hours and the Sultan stomps and stomps and glares and Henry drives that fucking wheelchair all over the place and Billy can be found eating turds in the shithouse almost anytime. Chippie sits and stares and blinks regularly at eight-minute intervals, I swear. The noise level is so high you can believe bedlam with your guts. So I grit my teeth and hunch hunchier over the table and the pencil races along almost as fast as my stomach contracts and my eyes buzz.

Feb. 14: Joe had a visitor today — good for Joe, and he didn't notice — and the visitor left... a Globe and Mail magazine. And in the Globe and Mail magazine was an article about the New Left. And instantly I am inspired to... wait, I'm getting excited. The article said that the New Left was a "revolt without dogma." Well, obviously, who is in a better position to write the dogma?

Feb. 18: I know what I'm doing. I'm redirecting. I'm venting all this spleen harmlessly. Why can't I just kick Powell in the balls? Oh no, I'm railing against poverty and hunger and privilege. I am making my isolation tragic and noble. I shout about social injustice (on the pages), and I scream against war and hypocrisy, hunger and poverty

as though I discovered them.

It's very tempting, the whole situation is very tempting. Here I am, on Ward Eight, surrounded by unfortunate souls, developing the most important political philosophy since Hegel and Marx sat at their

**"I wonder about the effect of living in a place where human warmth is so absent that you can feel it like a draft."**

little tables. Imagine Das Kapital squared being ground out on the geriatric wards of an insane asylum. How can I resist?

In a way, it's legitimate enough. We are political prisoners, all of us. We have dared to challenge mythology. Foolish of us, I guess, especially those of us who had a choice. Most of us didn't know we were challenging, most of us couldn't help it. Old Zack over here, he certainly didn't intend to outlive all of his people and he doesn't shit himself on purpose. But there he is: alone, old, vague, incontinent. You can't have embarrassing people like him around. Lock them up, get

them out of the way, there is room only for some kinds of social failure. And Billy, shortchanged on the marbles, well, better get him out of the way too, our society is too efficient to allow for this kind of incompetence.

Feb. 19: It works. But it works sporadically. The writing. Sometimes it gets me so high all the horror of this sitting room fades out completely. I feel competent, creative, energetic, invincible. But when it leaves me, oh, when it leaves me, I am at the bottom of the pit.

I'm scared.

And I can't even scream.

Feb. 20: Feeling the need to try and make contact, I wrote to my parents. I hadn't heard from them since the suicide attempt. "Keep it light," I told myself and chatted away inconsequentially until the very last line, when the bitterness grabbed me. I wrote, "I am grateful that you provided me with such a fine education. It has helped immensely in my present position. I pull the dung balls off the asses of aging syphilitics."

The letter came back stamped "RETURN TO PATIENT FOR CORRECTION." I snorted and wrote across the stamp, "How to correct the Truth?" Back it came again, a second "RETURN TO PATIENT FOR CORRECTION" stamp on it. But I was tired of the dialogue.

Feb. 21: Shower Day here in Happy Acres is the result of a col-

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# Cries for help go unheard

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 laboration between Goebbels, J. and Marx, G. It goes like this: We are all stripped and lined up and marched by twos into the showers. The block capos — Doug and, lately, me — shove the old boys into a stall, pour water all over them and pick off the easiest dung balls. Then the line goes out again and hospital gowns are dropped over most heads and clothes shoved at others. It's instructive if you're interested in the similarities of tragedy and comedy. Albert shuffles and chirps and walks carefully into the wall. Chip-pie stands unblinking in the shower like a stuffed praying mantis, the Sultan continues to stomp, Dominic just adds a little water to his five-six-seven litany, and Bernie, bobbing and weaving, shouts defiance despite his damp impotence. A number of the old boys forget why they're in line and wander off to take up their hobbies of eating

cigarette butts and praying, looking even a little more pathetic in their pale white skins. But then Albert can't make the turn into the shower so the young attendant gives him a short-arm in the ribs and I say what do you want to do that for it's not his fault he's got no motor control and the young attendant tells me to fuck off and mind my own business. I briefly weigh the consequences of returning the short-arm and decide against it and instead walk down to Peck's office and tell him about it and he reminds me that I'm crazy and anyway he's busy.

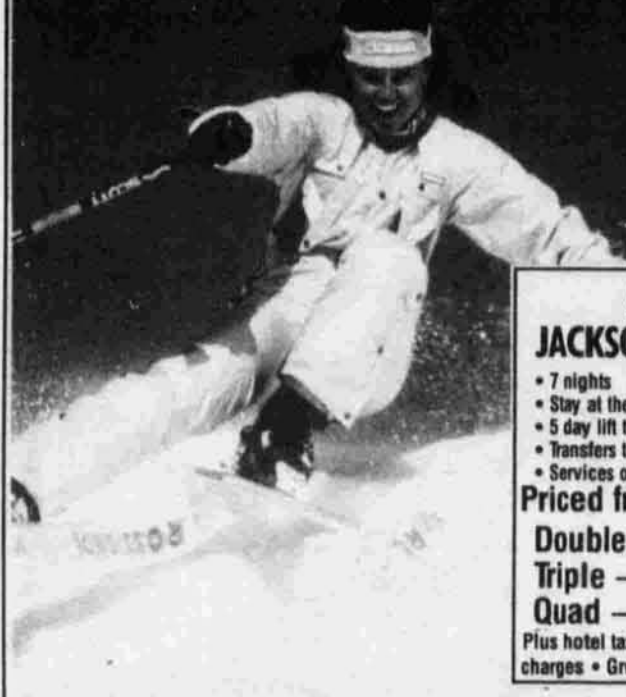
After I'm dressed, I sit in my corner, brooding and cursing and feeling guilty about my impotence. I wonder about the effects of living in a place where human warmth is so absent that you can feel it like a draft. And I realize again how isolated I am and become involved in my own pain. It's easier than being

involved with Albert's.

What a dehumanizing process. Do the Boys in the Office appreciate what they're doing? They must know that it is too dangerous for me to identify with the poor old buggers on the ward. I've got to protect myself from thinking — even for a moment — that Albert and I are alike. It's not a subtle trick. Power-people have always used depersonalization to get the powerless to do what they want: kill the Commies or stomp the niggers. So it's not surprising to find myself thinking of Albert as a GPI (general paresis of the insane), pulling the shade down over Albert's humanity, blacking out the fact that Albert and I are being oppressed together. These crummy little insights are painful. I know that it's going to be my survival that I fight for, not Albert's. And, right now, I think I'm losing.

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# Hospital was filled with poor

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Feb. 23: On five successive Mondays I asked the doctor to transfer me to another ward. "I can't take it any longer," I told him. He looked at me with the smallest of smiles on his face. "You're breaking my heart." I felt it so quickly that I couldn't suppress it — a huge tearing sob. "You're breaking mine!" I shrieked, and ran out of the office and threw myself at a steel-meshed window.

Now Peck has come to me. "I guess I learned ya," he says. "You're being transferred." It's over.

The next day Reville was transferred, not to another hospital as he'd expected, but rather to Kingston Psychiatric's maximum-security violent ward.

March 9: It shouldn't be possible to be an oddball here but I am. This hospital is filled with poor people. The middle-class contingent could meet comfortably in a phone booth. So I must be here accidentally. (Hey fellas, this is all a big misunderstanding. If you'll just unlock the door...) All my power systems are temporarily out of order or I'd never be here. I'm getting

a rare opportunity; I'm seeing how my people deal with slow learners. If you fail to learn how to behave in the correct unobtrusive way and you have already committed the horrible crime of being poor, you will surely be thrown in jail — this one or the one next door (Kingston Penitentiary). If you are given the choice — you won't be — take the one next door. You might learn something useful, welding or safe-cracking, and you'll have a better idea of when you're getting out. And people will hold their mouths a little differently when you tell them your previous address. After all, you will have been considered worthy of some kind of legal process, unlike us who do our indefinite time without having had our day in court.

So, a word of warning (you can trust me). Take care about the family you get born into. Then, if you safely make it into the middle class, don't piss all your relatives off. Best of all, get yourself a private psychiatrist and pay him all your money. When the white coats come to get you, he'll intercede on your behalf. Because he'll suspect that you held some of that loot back.

March 15: I have always been able to adapt well. Maybe too well. I've gotten used to the numerous small deprivations of this place. I've gotten used to having no money and no place to spend any. I wear joint clothes; mine have worn out, fallen apart after a visit to the hospital laundry, or have disappeared. But I can't get used to the lack of love and warmth and tenderness. That's the big turn-off and that must be the biggest single obstacle to recovery for everybody here. Nobody gives a fuck.

## Pill prison

I read Camus and understand his isolation. No one can share my feelings. I can't share theirs. But if only I had someone to talk to, someone to hold, someone to hold me! The others here aren't much help. Some don't talk at all, some shouldn't, some won't. Some have forgotten to be sad. The common ground is the environment. We share the same space, eat the same dull food, breathe the same stale air. That's it. I say to Big Bob, "Hey, man, why do you put up with this shit?" He looks puzzled and then mumbles, "Ain't nothing I kin do about it, is there?", and the horrible part is, maybe he's right. I say to Chuck, "You got town parole, why don't you split?", and he says, "Sure, sure, what do I do when I run out of pills?", and I see how cleverly they've got it worked out; if the system doesn't keep you, then the dope will. And the hell of it is, I don't think there's anything very much wrong with Chuck. They just never let him try to handle his problems.

I wasn't ready for this. Nobody should be. How do you fit this into any notion of the world? How do I match up these pictures? My son lying cooing in his crib with a Down's patient blowing someone in a cupboard? My wife whispering "I love you" with the Black Prince shouting, "You little cocksuckers, I'll kick your fuckin' asses for you!"? Am I so naive? Or is this the outrage that I think it is? If a man becomes an animal, what does that say for his keeper?

Peter Fox

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