

Diagnosis: Illness or awakening?

BY WILL HALL
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Ed Knight is a Zen Buddhist and a leader of the mental health recovery movement – and someone in recovery himself. Diagnosed with

schizophrenia, Ed writes of one of his many spiritual experiences in a mental institution: “I walked down the hall in terrible emotional pain, planning to kill myself to end the pain and praying

‘Help.’ God answered. The next day the pain went down. I continued to live, realizing that as terrible as it was, as impossible as it was, I could relate to the situation of being crazy in a society that equated humanity with rationality. I had prayed as St. Francis de Sales urged, ‘as if everything depends on God.’ Now, as the Saint insisted, I needed to act as if everything depended on me...

“For me,” Ed writes, “the process of recovery began in a strip cell. Lying nude and cold on a cement floor, deeply ashamed, I begged the ‘mind-shrinker’ who entered, for a cigarette. I recalled what I had heard of the great wisdom tradition of modernity, existentialism: ‘The situation is never the problem, only the relationship you take to it is the problem.’”

At that moment, rebellion against madness and the way madmen and women are treated began to take on a direction. It came to me then that my life was out of control, not because of madness, but because of my attitude toward madness.”

When I first met Ed in 2005 I wasn't sure what to expect. Would this be another recovery leader telling me to do what my doctor says, accept my illness, take my pills, and live life as the less-than-human creature we call the “mental patient?” Would he tell me my voices, visions, and psychic experiences were delusions that just needed to be suppressed and ignored?

As Ed began to tell me his story, of being homeless, locked up, and finally finding his way to recovery through spiritual practice in the Zen and Christian traditions, as well as existentialism, I realized I had met a kindred spirit. Like me, Ed has looked beyond the diagnosis of schizophrenia to explore the deep mystery of madness.

What does it mean to be labeled crazy in a crazy world? Buddhists, after all, teach that we are all mentally ill because of our attachment to samara, the world of appearances. Christians teach that we all struggle with a stain on our conscience. Maybe meditation and spiritual inquiry can help lead the way out of the labyrinth of mental illness.

Like many people, Ed takes medication to help him with his experiences. And like many people, I don't take medication – it never helped me, only made things worse. Maybe the world is not either / or, maybe each of us has an individual and unique path to recovery. Spiritual practice certainly doesn't work for everyone, but it is a perspective worth learning about to find out if it might work for you.

Isn't it time to look at madness with respect for mental diversity, rather than fitting everyone into the same one-size-fits-all box? Now that would be a true spiritual awakening.

Founded by schizophrenia survivor Will Hall, Portland Hearing Voices organizes support groups, educational events, holistic alternatives, training, and counseling resources for people who experience voices, visions, and different realities often labeled as mental disorders.



Ed Knight will be speaking along with Will Hall at a special event to benefit Portland Hearing Voices.

On Wednesday, Nov. 18, 6-8:30 p.m., Ed Knight and Will Hall will be speaking at the event “Mental Illness Or Spiritual Awakening? New Visions of Mind and Crisis.” For more information check www.portlandhearingvoices.net.

The event will be at the Bamboo Grove Salon, 134 SE Taylor, Portland. The event is \$8 - \$15 donation to Portland Hearing Voices but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. (Tendremos una mini-presentacion en espanol para participantes hispanohablantes.)

Ed Knight is dually diagnosed with schizophrenia and alcoholism. He is the

steward of The Healing Circle, a Zen Peacemaker Circle, and a senior in the Buddhist Zen Peacemaker Sangha. A widely recognized researcher and teacher in mental illness recovery and mutual support, Knight is vice president of Recovery, Rehabilitation and Mutual Support at Valueoptions, as well as a mentor in the Prison Dharma

Network. (www.professored.com)

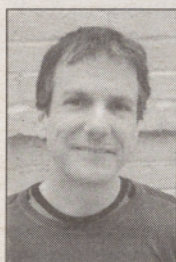
Will Hall is diagnosed with schizophrenia. His advocacy work includes Portland Hearing Voices, Mental Disability Rights International, The Icarus Project, and hosting Madness Radio, heard on KBOO FM. A longtime western Taoist meditator and yoga practitioner, Hall is currently studying Process Oriented Psychology. Hall was featured in the Newsweek magazine article “Listening to Madness.” (www.willhall.net)

Sponsored by Mental Health Association of Portland.
www.portlandhearingvoices.net



COMING UP
FOR AIR

The Mental Health
Association of Portland



Will Hall is the founder of Portland Hearing Voices and a board member of the Mental Health Association of Portland. The Mental Health Association of Portland is a nonprofit advisory organization that supports advocacy efforts on issues around mental health. Information about their work is available at www.mentalhealthportland.org

embrace *many* diversity

portlandhearingvoices.net

efficient,
affordable,
high-quality
screen-printed
t-shirts with a
quick turn time.

Try screen-printed
shopping totes
for your next event!

Blue Ink, Inc.
321 NE Davis St.
Portland, OR
503-232-8578 Phone
503-232-1834 Fax
Mention this ad for a
free screen

blue
ink



a witham & dickey affiliated company.

Thousands of Voices, One Message
**FUND AND BUILD
AFFORDABLE HOUSING!**
January 20, 2010 — 11 AM to 2 PM
San Francisco Federal Building



We need you to join!

Sisters Of The Road, Street Roots, and the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) are joining community-based organizations from up and down the west coast to **march on the Federal Building and demand a renewed commitment to affordable housing and an end to civil rights violations against the poor.** Together we can make sure that we all have an affordable place to call HOME and Civil Rights to protect us!

To learn more: call 415-621-2533
or visit <http://wraphome.org/>

Please buy Street Roots only from vendors wearing Street Roots badges. Your vendor will thank you!