

FAMILY COUNCIL

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Mrs. R. F. - I tell him to keep it a secret. People are cruel.

Steven F. - I don't want to worry about it coming out later.

Mrs. R. F. - Our son had a nervous breakdown at college. After emergency treatment at the campus clinic, he was sent home for therapy.

Fortunately the psychiatrist we consulted was able to get to the root of Steve's trouble within a few months. It was his terrible fear of not making good. Soon he was able to take extension courses near home, and last year he graduated as a senior in a small, local college. Holding down a part-time job, too, he's in fine shape.

But a problem arises now in filling out application blanks for law school. They ask about previous illness. Should we tell the truth?

Steven F. - I know my mother'd like to protect me from the stigma that still clings to mental illness. But I'd better be truthful.

What happens if I meet someone from the old college who'll spill the beans? Actually there's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide. I became ill and I was cured, that's all. In speaking up, maybe I can show people the value of good psychiatric treatment. It put me back on my feet.

Anyway, when you apply for admission or for a job it's no more than fair to answer questions honestly. Those in charge have the right to know whom they're dealing with.

Up to now, though, I'll admit I've kept mum about the experience.

The Council: Steven admits he hasn't put his brave resolve to the test. Unfortunately he will find that public attitudes are often antiquated where mental illness is concerned. Stigma has not been erased.

Where the true nature of a breakdown is understood, that is, among the professionals and the enlightened, there is no stigma attached to an ex-mental patient. To these his condition was the clear result of pressures, like a water-main explosion. As with heart disease or ulcer, it might strike anyone whose capacity for stress is overtaxed.

But on other levels, over the lunch pail or around the water cooler, the old cliché's may get bandied out. That's why, for Steven, it may be the better part of valor to be discreet.

Perhaps this country will some day catch up with England where, thanks to public education, everything about mental illness is out in the open. There, a man stops off at his mental hygiene clinic as casually as at his dentist's office.

From the facts here, Steven was never "insane." Nor was he "committed." He was emotionally ill, disabled by blocks. His best bet, in disclosing his past illness, lies in compromise. Answer legal, confidential forms truthfully. A driver's license application, for example, inquires about treatment. Steven's doctor would back him up with a statement as to his present good health, and that would be that. But there's no point in telling all to fellow students, co-workers, random acquaintances. The information may serve no good purpose.

From Dr. William C. Menninger comes the statement that, in a broad sense, mental illness strikes "one out of one." But until our society understands that, Steven should divulge his own background only when it is constructively relevant.

Pool Attendance Said About Average

Continued warm weather has made attendance at Hawthorne swimming pool about average, City Parks and Recreation Director Robert Hawthorne said Wednesday.

Tuesday's attendance at the pool, the only one now open, was 439, he said. Labor Day, the last day that both pools were open, 548 swimmers were registered. Of those 390 were at Hawthorne and 158 at Jackson.

Hawthorne pool will remain open through Sept. 9.

APPROVE PLAN

Washington (AP)—The Senate Agriculture Committee Wednesday approved the watershed work plan for the middle fork of the Hood river in Oregon.



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