

Damaging Help

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A Story of Psychiatric Imprisonment

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*For M., to whom this book is written, in the hope that you
will understand me.*

And for M., the only therapist who has ever helped me.

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This book tells a story based on true events. Its intention is to describe the author's personal experiences with psychiatry. The surrounding narrative may be simplified and fictionalised. Furthermore, for privacy reasons, all individuals are anonymised, and only country names are provided for locations. Specific events may be shortened, rearranged or subject to creative licence to ensure a smooth storyline and protect individuals' identities. The events are described from the author's perspective and are based on the author's memory, records, and recordings.

This book contains content related to mental illness, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, and violence.

Introduction

Dear Anne,

I hope you are fine. You are probably wondering why I am writing this letter. Or maybe not. There is so much more that I wanted to tell you, but I didn't have enough time. I didn't even plan to tell you the whole story because that would have been too long anyway. When we met last time, I wanted to focus on the events you were involved in. But my story is much longer, and I have never told it to anyone so far. I will not manage that with one letter. I am going to write you several letters.

You might have realised that I always addressed you throughout the whole process. This might be unfair since you were not the person who actually made the decisions, and you were also not involved in everything. So, when I address you, I might often mean not only you but also your colleagues and related people. I think I should apologise, maybe before I even start, since I know it is unfair to address only you here. I don't mean to offend you. I only want to tell my story, and I hope you will understand it a little bit.

For the last several years, I have been looking for my freedom—the freedom you took away from me. I tried many things to get it back. I will write about it later in more detail. But I failed in that, so I decided to try a different approach. Maybe it is my last chance to find my freedom again. I am writing to you to tell you that I forgive you. I forgive you to be able to move on in my life. It is essential for me, for you, and also for lots of other people, so hopefully we can all learn something from it. I write this because you hurt me. Somehow, I have the feeling that you destroyed my life. I am still trying to adjust my life in a new way—to live with the past and what happened, although it is going to affect my future—the future I could no longer see.

I write to you in English. It was the language we communicated in the first two times we met. My Dutch might be better now, but I still don't feel like I have enough words to talk about what hap-

pened. And I don't know if you can understand German. It might be a little strange that I am writing this whole story in English as a native German speaker. I tried first to write it in German for myself, but I failed. I realised that I write not only for me but also to someone, to you. Therefore, I needed to change the language to one we both understand.

To be honest, writing in English will not solve the problem that we speak different languages. I know you have a problem with several words I will use; you told me the last time we met. I replied that I have a problem with your words. In my opinion, the words you use are often euphemisms. I don't think that we will find a common language here. I am not sure if you would like to continue reading this, which is filled with words you might not appreciate. But I cannot change my words since I have to write my own story.

We have met four times so far. I wish we never had. The second time was the worst experience. You don't know my story. You only know yours, which is your truth but is also widely accepted in institutions and society. I feel like I am being blamed for what happened, although I am the one who has suffered, both back then and up to now, and who will be affected by the diagnoses and statements you wrote about me in the future. I want to tell you my story because it is my life, and so far, my story has only been written by others. Now, it is my time, and I will tell you my story.

If a person is locked up by unauthorised individuals, we call that deprivation of liberty. If a person is locked up due to a court sentence, we call that a custodial sentence. I was also locked up. But in my case, it was called help. Or treatment. You probably believe that you helped me. To be honest, I believe that you want to help. But do you know what help is? Do you think that you define what help is? Do you know what would help others? Do you think that it was help what you did with me?

I remember it quite the opposite way. It was the most painful situ-

ation I have ever experienced. I was at home when your colleagues and the police attacked me, handcuffed me, and brought me to the psychiatric ward, where I was locked away half-naked in an isolation cell—your help. You may use different words, but they will never change the actions that destroyed my life.

At the same time, I try not to see it that way. Not that my life was destroyed. Maybe it is a part of my life that I still need to integrate and give a place to. So, it is about me. It is my story. And it started long before we met for the first time. There were many other people involved. I have never told the whole story to anyone so far. Some people know parts of it, but no one knows it completely. You are the first person I am trying to give a complete overview of my journey through psychiatry. Although I appeared only every five years for a short period in the system, it kept me busy for years. In the next letter, I will start at the beginning with the whole story—with mine.

Kind regards,
Teresa

The Beginning

What Is Life?

Dear Anne,

Do you ever ask what life is? Or what its purpose is? I am wondering what my life is like and how I ended up where I am now.

But maybe it is a good idea to start with the question of who I am before I get to the part about psychiatry in my life. I sometimes wonder how I ended up in the system of forced psychiatry. Wasn't I just a normal person?

I come from a pretty typical family and had quite an ordinary life, in my opinion. I grew up in Germany, together with my younger siblings. There is nothing special about it at all. But perhaps the question is not who I am, but who you are. 'Who are we?' is undoubtedly a very difficult question to answer. Probably, it changes with time since we are affected by what happens to us, who we meet, and what experiences we have in life.

I turned out to be a good student in school. I always received good grades. I don't know why I was good, but I realised quickly that it had its downsides. It created an expectation that I would always have good grades. An average grade was considered bad for me. Also, having good grades meant that my mother often pointed out that someone else in my class had a better grade. Additionally, I felt bad when other students started to mention that they were better than me. I didn't have a problem with them having good grades, but did it have to be in a way that reminded me I was sometimes worse? I didn't know how to avoid these situations; it simply wasn't possible.