

Interview with Hebriana

Summer of 1998

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What does Hebriana say today? I asked her to read my manuscript *Love, Hope, & Brain Science*. It is twenty years since she made the two drawings reproduced in that paper, eighteen years since she last was a psychiatric patient, forcibly injected with a neuroleptic drug, and fourteen years since she described her neuroleptic experience in *Should Neuroleptic Drug Be Banned?*

In the latter paper, from 1984, she talked about creativity and insight. She quoted Rollo May: "What we feel in creative moments, moments of insight, is joy . . . joy that goes with heightened consciousness, the mood that accompanies the actualizing of one's own potentialities." I noted that she is "a well-functioning, breast-feeding mother," and that obviously with neuroleptic drugs "she could never have become the alive, competent and creative person that she is today."

The photos shown here were taken three years later, in August 1987. Her life since has been happy and creative. She lives with her husband and their daughter, who by now has grown into a radiant, intelligent, simply wonderful young woman.

Remember when you read the following that few people are strong and truth-loving enough to face the worst. So, when Hebriana tells us about the sorrow and hopelessness of a survivor, she is able to do so because she is a life-affirming, joyful and creative person. Just listen to her laughing!

After having read my manuscript she made these comments over the phone in July 1998:

– It is alien to me to relate my experiences to the concepts of psychiatry. It is a violation. It is terrifying. Psychiatry is something one should stay clear of. I cannot identify myself in a psychiatric context. That is not where I become visible.

– I still am who I am. What I experienced then is still a reality. Those fundamental experiences are still going on. But I have become better at relating to them. Now I don't need to be destructive when I am afraid. The instrument that is me, "Hebriana," has improved.

– The pictures I made then were made while it was going on. They were an anchor. They were a means to stay, to remain present. Now I wait much longer before I do anything. Now I am much better at staying without doing anything, just being and waiting. I can breathe even though something powerful, something I do not understand, something chaotic is going on. I demand of myself that I do not escape, that I remain awake in what is important.

– I believe every person experiences what I experience. But not so vividly and clearly perhaps. It is a question of what we tolerate or do not tolerate in our consciousness. I think other people may have [laughing loud] better automatic reflexes [to shut things out].

What do you say about giving neuroleptics to you or to someone like you?

– God! It should not happen. But I know it is being done. It is horrible. With these drugs you are deprived of your human rights. You are petrified. You are deprived of the ability to develop a language of your own. You are deprived of the possibility of being human.

– It was a horrible existence. I was fettered. The air becomes thick and dense. You cannot get through. It is incomprehensible. That state, if anything, is incomprehensible.

– In order to integrate these experiences [of psychiatric violence and forced drugging] you have to accept how helpless you can be. You have to realize that you cannot trust people. There are many disgusting people around. See what pedophiliacs can do! Usually they hide it. They are cautious. But then they stop being cautious. [When not watched. When alone with someone unable to speak. When sanctioned by authority. Example: personnel overpowering Hebriana to inject a neuroleptic drug]. It is horrible how I was treated. They were so insensitive, so cruel.

– People say: "I mean no harm to you personally." But they obey a system. Do I have to be like that, too: a person with a professional attitude? That would mean abandoning what it is for me to be a human being.

– I feel I am a survivor. It is impossible to find a space or an opportunity to tell other people about these experiences. I am not allowed to share them, because they are beyond what people want to know. This is not fun at all to live with. People do not want to see the truth. In a way I could just as well be dead.

– I was a witness. I watched. I was not unconscious. But I was a silent witness, since I was deprived of any possibility to act, to express myself. It is only recently that I have been able to begin integrating my experiences of psychiatry. Until now they have been too difficult. Such knowledge is hard to bear. It makes it hard to feel secure. Society and people cannot be trusted.

– I feel a sorrow that I cannot share. Who wants these feelings, this sorrow! The gulf between me and other people -even people I seem close to - can fill me with hopelessness. People do not want to believe that something so horrible can go on in our society. It would destroy their illusion. They would not be able to continue. They would have to do something.

– Because of my experiences - that a normal person is not meant to have - I feel old - I feel as someone with responsibility for the others.

Against all odds Hebriana escaped her neuroleptic fate. She was able to "develop a language of her own." She speaks for millions who are silenced forever.

"I was a silent witness." "I was not unconscious." "It is only recently that I have been able to begin integrating," that is, remember, express, and hope despite hopelessness – to be able to share experiences "that a normal person is not meant to have."

Survivors of other horrors created by humans (war, concentration camps, childhood sexual abuse, torture) have also often needed decades, and often a lot of therapy, love, and support before they have been able to confront and integrate their memories and begin telling us what they have been through. Survivors need our acceptance and our recognition of their experience in order to be able to return to the human community, and feel that they are members of the human race.

These other groups are approved victims. They get understanding and acceptance. They live in a society that recognizes its duty to try to restore their sense of security.

Neuroleptic survivors, on the other hand, live in an unrepentant society that keeps perpetrating the horror they underwent. "God! It should not happen. But I know it is being done . . . People do not want to believe that somethings so horrible can go on in our society."

Neuroleptic survivors get the opposite of understanding and acceptance. They get denial. Such denial is a cause of sorrow and hopelessness: "I feel a sorrow that I cannot share." Such denial can be lethal: "I could just as well be dead." Such denial is a continuing crime.

Years ago in the Dagens Nyheter, 25 August 1985, I said: "Since neuroleptic drugging is usually a 'one way street' most victims disappear from us. We never find out what they and we have lost. We are left wondering 'What becomes of all longing that does not find its goal?'"