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PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF ROXANNE MELISSA STEWART JOHNSON

1 I am not safe in Jamaica because I suffer from mental illness. The state cannot offer me
2 protection and I am not safe anywhere in Jamaica.
3 I am an educated, intelligent, and articulate person. I am fully aware that I have a mental illness
4 and that I require life-long treatment on medication. However, I am also aware that I have human
5 rights which have been routinely violated in Jamaica and I fear being involuntarily hospitalized
6 despite not presenting any threat to anyone including myself. A problem I am also dealing with
7 is sexual abuse from my father beginning when I was a child into adulthood. In addition I feared
8 having my pregnancy terminated or my unborn child harmed and that is also why I fled Jamaica.
9 And as a Seventh Day Adventist, I do not believe in abortion, so it is also against my religious
10 beliefs.

History of Illness and Treatment

11 In 2005 I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder while pursuing my Master's degree at the Rhode
12 Island School of Design in the United States. I experienced my first episode of psychosis which
13 led to my hospitalization at The Miriam Hospital in Rhode Island. I was subsequently transferred
14 to Butler Hospital, a psychiatric hospital also in Rhode Island. While at Butler I was placed on a
15 series of medications until settling onto Risperdal and Depakote. I was discharged approximately
16 two weeks later and placed in the out-patient clinic for one week before returning to Jamaica.

17 When I returned to Jamaica I was placed in the care of psychiatrist, Dr. E. Anthony Allen, who
18 continued me on those two medications. I found him to be a cold and unsympathetic psychiatrist
19 who demonstrated only an interest in treating me as a mental illness and not as a human with a
20 mental illness. I soon began suffering from what I would later learn were common side effects of
21 Risperdal and Depakote. I experienced vivid and frightening hallucinations and thought my
22 condition was getting worse. On Depakote I experienced rapid weight gain and swelling of the
23 lower legs and feet. I also suffered from severe depression with severe crying spells.
24 Eventually since I continually complained of depression and crying spells, he prescribed
25 Wellbutrin but I continued to suffer from depression and emotional instability. He never

26 suggested counselling or psychotherapy. I finally stopped seeing him when I found myself going
27 through a stressful situation with a boyfriend and instead of lending me a sympathetic ear, he
28 prescribed a higher dosage of Depakote.

29 In or about 2011 I started seeing psychiatrist, Janet La Grenade. During this period I also went
30 for counselling sessions with a psychologist, Dr. Karen Richards. Dr. La Grenade prescribed 600
31 mg of Seroquel (Quetiapine). It caused me to experience extra-pyramidal side effects,
32 uncontrollable movements in my arms, and the sensation of electric shock moving up and down
33 my arms to the point where my mother had to lie on top of me holding my arms to my sides to
34 stop the movements. I also suffered from very vivid hallucinations and nightmares which I had
35 not experienced before. I also found her cold and unsympathetic. I recall her accusing me of
36 becoming delusional because I remarked to her that I had bought my friends a laptop and
37 Windows 8, respectively, so they would no longer need to pirate software. After this incident I
38 stopped seeing Dr. La Grenade.

39 In 2013 I had another psychotic episode that required hospitalization. I self-presented to the
40 Medical Associates Hospital in Kingston and was cared for by Dr. Charles Thesiger. Upon my
41 discharge I started seeing Dr. Winston De La Haye, the current chief medical officer of Jamaica.
42 I found him to have an almost commercial approach to healthcare. He listed all the various
43 pharmaceutical “products” he had on hand, speaking about them almost like a product line. I
44 discontinued seeing him.

45 I wanted to try a more holistic approach so my mother then brought me to Mrs. Jennifer Wilson a
46 cognitive behavioural therapist at Worjen Medical Centre. However, her comportment raised
47 doubts in my mind about her training and qualifications as a cognitive behavioural therapist,
48 which I was also never able to verify. And her handling of my cash payments to her were also
49 questionable as I never received receipts for my payments and on one occasion I gave her more
50 money than the cost of the session and she never reimbursed me for the difference.

51 The Worjen Medical Centre is intended to undertake a holistic approach to health care; however,
52 Mrs. Wilson took a religiously fanatical approach to her counselling sessions and told me that I
53 did not need to take any medications because I was “healed in Jesus’ name” and stated that the
54 reason I was not experiencing this healing was due to my lack of faith. During one counselling

55 session she became angry and aggressive towards me, leaving me in such a stressed state that I
56 walked myself over to Andrew's Memorial Hospital and asked to be hospitalized. She visited me
57 during my hospitalization and I told her that I did not want to continue counselling with her
58 because of her aggression. She justified her aggression by telling me that she was not speaking to
59 me but the demons within me. At this point I realized that she was trying to exorcize me so I
60 stopped treatment with her.

61 It was shortly after this that I decided to seek treatment with Dr. Charles Thesiger who changed
62 my medications. I had told him about the side effects of Depakote and he switched me to
63 different medication. I had found him to be very caring towards me during my stay at Medical
64 Associates Hospital so I returned to him. He actually asked me about my childhood, personal life
65 and history. He treated me like a human with rights. When I became pregnant with my son,
66 Benjamin, he respected my wishes to continue the pregnancy without medication so as to not
67 harm my baby. He said to me we will just monitor it and see how it goes. I was seeing him about
68 twice monthly for monitoring during pregnancy and I experienced no psychosis for the duration
69 of the pregnancy. Unfortunately, he died shortly before Benjamin's birth in January 2015. He
70 died from complications of the Chic-V, a mosquito-borne virus, which he had contracted during
71 its outbreak in Jamaica. I was extremely distraught at Dr. Thesiger's passing.

72 In January 2015, on the recommendation of a colleague, my mother took me to see Dr. Earl
73 Wright. I found him to be impersonal like many of the psychiatrists before him. He was
74 interested in me as a mental illness not as a person with a mental illness.

75 During my son's birth in 2015, I was also mistreated by the maternity ward staff and my
76 obstetrician. They chemically induced my contractions with oxytocin and I was given nothing for
77 the pain except Demeral which only caused me to vomit. I was yelled at for screaming from the
78 pain and also blamed by my obstetrician for not having any milk who said it was because of all
79 my screaming. When I complained to Dr. Patrick Rutherford, the president and CEO of
80 Andrew's Memorial Hospital of how I was treated, he said since I have bipolar disorder it could
81 all have just been in my head. I still struggle with symptoms of post-natal PTSD and even though
82 I asked for counselling for the experience, it was ignored.

83 It was three months after this experience that I suffered from another episode of psychosis in
84 April and walked myself to Medical Associates Hospital for help. I was hospitalized and placed

85 under the care of Dr. Frank Knight, who, although he interviewed me multiple times and
86 observed that I was lucid at the time of the interviews, decided without informing me or
87 obtaining my consent, to inject me with Modecate (Fluphenazine) which I later learned was
88 meant for violent, non-compliant patients and was not to be given to patients under sedation or
89 unconscious. I was under a lot of sedation at the hospital and I was unconscious when I was
90 injected. I was given this drug in combination with Lithium and Haloperidol. When I woke up I
91 had a speech impediment and could not form sentences. I also found him rude and aggressive.
92 He treated me with little respect. And I remember him yelling at me when I had come down into
93 the hospital lobby to see my then three-month old baby.

94 Upon discharge from the hospital I continued to suffer many side effects from the Modecate
95 injection, including somnolence, depression, slow, slurred speech and blurred vision. My facial
96 muscles also slackened creating what is known as a “mask” and I was not able to show much
97 emotion due to my slack facial muscles. I could not take care of my three month-old baby. It
98 saddened me that my baby began bonding more to our housemaid and my mother rather than to
99 me. When I told Dr. Wright about this, he dismissed all of it.

100 I returned to Medical Associates Hospital and asked about the drug Dr. Knight had injected. The
101 staff were very reluctant to give me any information or allow me to look at my medical records
102 for the period I was under Dr. Knight’s care. They were also unable to provide me with his
103 contact information.

104 After my hospitalization at Medical Associates Hospital, I was placed on Lithium and Cogentin
105 to counteract the side effects of Olanzapine which had been prescribed to me by Dr. Wright. I
106 told him about the severe depression I was experiencing and he largely ignored it. He finally
107 prescribed Lexapro after being opposed to it because he was concerned it would trigger my
108 mania. I was also experiencing trouble sleeping at night so he prescribed 200mg of Seroquel to
109 act as a sleep aid. In November 2015 I obtained employment as a graphic artist at the sports
110 television station, Sportsmax Ltd. I told Dr. Wright that I was having a hard time with
111 concentration and creativity so he reluctantly prescribed Concerta.

112 I found out I was pregnant on or about 20 December 2016. At the beginning of January 2017 my
113 parents, my husband, and I consulted Dr. Wright because we were concerned about the effects of

114 the medications on the baby and because my first pregnancy was without any medication and I
115 had not experienced any psychosis, I believed this was a viable option. Dr. Wright told me that I
116 could come off all the medications. However, about less than a week later I started to
117 experience anxiety and paranoia so my husband who is a pharmacist suggested that I go back
118 onto 200 mg of Seroquel. I listened to my husband because Dr. Wright was on leave at that time.
119 I felt better, but I still felt a bit on edge so a couple of days later he suggested I increase the
120 dosage to 400 mL of Seroquel.

121 I continued treatment with Dr. Wright until January 2017. During my second pregnancy, while I
122 was going through the stress of separation from my husband, he responded by simply increasing
123 the dosage of my medication from 200 mg to 800 mg. I sensed that he had absolutely no concern
124 for the health of my unborn child and I became worried about the high dosage on the health of
125 the fetus. After asking around a friend recommended Dr. Jacqueline Martin who I was told
126 would give top priority to my pregnancy.

127 On 27 January 2017 I had my first appointment with Dr. Martin. At that appointment she tried to
128 persuade me to terminate my pregnancy and to be hospitalized. She told me that something may
129 have already damaged the baby and that the baby may not survive. I refused to terminate my
130 pregnancy, but continued with her in the hopes that she would respect my decision and treat my
131 pregnancy with priority. At the time that I started seeing Dr. Martin I was still on 400 mg of
132 Seroquel. I rescheduled an appointment with Dr. Martin for 9 February 2017 for a prescription
133 refill. However, at this appointment Dr. Martin aggressively threatened to hospitalize and drug
134 me and attempted to persuade my father for me to be involuntarily hospitalized at Ward 21 – the
135 psychiatric ward of the University Hospital of the West Indies and a notoriously horrible place
136 for mental health patients. She told me I needed to be on 600 mg of Seroquel, a mood stabilizer
137 and a number of other medications, including Olanzapine and Diazepam. I had convulsions in
138 the past when given 600 mg of Seroquel (Quetiapine). She wouldn't let me talk to tell her of this
139 past medical history, nor did she ask. I was not experiencing any symptoms of psychosis and had
140 no suicidal or homicidal behaviours and I was not a threat to anyone or to myself. I was just
141 going through the stress of separating from my spouse while pregnant. She eventually provided
142 me with a three-week prescription refill of Seroquel.

143 After our appointment I contacted two lawyers that worked at my father's law firm, Grant,
144 Stewart, Phillips and Co., expressing that I was fearful that Dr. Martin would again try to have
145 me hospitalized. During the appointment on February 9th after I realized that Dr. Martin was
146 attempting to have me hospitalized, I started recording our conversation with the intention of
147 consulting a lawyer about my options. One lawyer, Denise Kitson, Q. C., brushed off my
148 concerns saying "If you lock yourself up in your house, she can't get you". I then consulted
149 Susan Ridsen-Foster who told me that Dr. Martin had no right to attempt to hospitalize me but
150 said she did not want to get involved because my father is her colleague. I attended both of Dr.
151 Martin's meeting with my father because she refused to see me by myself and for the balance of
152 both appointments she basically addressed my father without directly engaging with me, the
153 patient.

154 Later that evening my mother also told me that she wanted me to agree to the conditions Dr.
155 Martin was pressing for in relation to residential hospitalization. She wanted me to be restricted
156 to their house under the supervision of a psych-aid where I would be forced to take drugs
157 harmful to my baby. My mother also pressed multiple times for me to have an abortion saying it
158 was a bad idea financially. My experience with my mom has been that whenever we get into an
159 argument including arguments about my dad's sexually inappropriate behaviour towards me she
160 blames "the bipolar" despite the fact that she is an educated person and the Director of the Joint
161 Board of Teacher Education.

162 The next day I had a counselling appointment with psychologist, Dr. Karen Richards. I told
163 her about what had happened with Dr. Martin. Dr. Richards told me that based on her opinion
164 she thought what I needed instead was emotional support from my family. I asked her if she
165 would be willing to write a letter stating such. At first she agreed but during a subsequent
166 telephone conversation she started providing excuses as to why a letter from her would not be
167 helpful. I believe she did not want to become involved in a legal battle with Dr. Martin. Instead
168 she referred me to psychiatrist, Dr. Terrence Bernard, who would be able to provide me with a
169 second psychiatric opinion. She explained that this would be more effective as only psychiatrists
170 have the legal authority to involuntarily hospitalize an individual.

171 I called Dr. Bernard and he agreed to see me that evening to provide me with an evaluation along
172 with a written medical opinion. However, when I told him that the doctor who attempted to

173 hospitalize me was Dr. Martin, he changed his mind stating that since he knew her personally he
174 did not want to become involved.

175 As a last attempt, I made an appointment with a Dr. Nyamakye Richards, who I understood had a
176 more holistic approach to psychiatry. I had my first appointment with her on 23 February. I also
177 recorded this conversation because I did not know what to expect and I wanted to protect myself
178 in case that became necessary. The appointment started out well until I told her that Dr. Martin
179 recommended that I needed hospitalization. She said she understood why her colleague would
180 make recommendations for more medication and that she could not comment on the situation as
181 she was not there. She then attempted to blame me for my husband's abusive behaviour. She a;so
182 stated that I should return to Dr. Wright since he had known me longer. She agreed that Seroquel
183 is one of the safest drugs for pregnancy.

184 I still needed a prescription for more Seroquel so I reached out to a general practitioner I knew,
185 Dr. Mark Rickets. He began to interrogate me about why I was not under the supervision of a
186 psychiatrist. I explained my fears. I explained that Dr. Martin had threatened me with
187 hospitalization and drugs unsafe for my pregnancy and that Dr. Richards had told me that I must
188 be experiencing a psychotic episode since I was having marital troubles. Dr. Rickets then said
189 Dr. Richards "might be right" but finally and reluctantly agreed to give me a three-month
190 prescription for Seroquel.

Background and Relationship with Husband

191 My husband, Romain, and I met in October 2012 and began dating in May 2013. Our
192 relationship started deteriorating in April 2014 when I was pregnant with our son. We finally
193 separated in January 2017, this was precipitated by my husband throwing our son by the back
194 of his head and ... onto the floor on 25 December 2016. I became pregnant with our
195 second child in November 2016; he was initially very supportive. Shortly after I was pregnant
196 with Benjamin in Aril 2014, his temperament began to change; he became angry and aggressive
197 and told me I could not continue my relationships with my male friends. Shortly after we were
198 married on 18 December 2016 when I attempted to post our wedding pictures on Facebook he
199 threatened to come over and delete them. When I tried to calm him down by hugging him he
200 began yelling at me so angrily that I jumped out of bed out of fear that he would hit me. That

201 night I stayed at my parent's house because I did not feel safe. When Romain threw our then 23-
202 month son on the floor, my parents and I decided that Benjamin was no longer safe in his care
203 without supervision. On previous occasions Romain, who is a pharmacist, had tried to give liquid
204 medication to our son who would often get fevers by deliberately forcing the syringe down his
205 air passage causing him to choke and throw up, so I had reason to believe that this would not
206 remain an isolated incident.

207 I sent Benjamin to stay at my parents' house under the supervision of my mother and his nanny
208 while we tried to work our relationship out. However, our relationship continued to deteriorate. I
209 remember one morning he was ironing his clothes for work while I was in bed. I asked him to
210 please be careful with the iron as it was close to where I was laying. In response he started to
211 iron even closer to me and when I got up he took the hot iron and brought it very close to my
212 face.

213 During this time he had also begun an inappropriate relationship with a young lady and when I
214 asked him if he was having or planning to have an affair with her, he would simply walk away in
215 silence. In separate discussions with both the Pastor who married us and my father, they each
216 urged him to stop the relationship with her, but he continued. On the night of 5 January, after we
217 had both gone to bed, I caught him downstairs in the living room speaking with her on the phone.
218 I decided to let our family and friends know about this mistakenly believing that it would shame
219 him into modifying his behaviour. His response to friends and family inquiring about the
220 inappropriate relationship was to separate and move to the parish of St. Elizabeth on 10 January.
221 After he moved out I brought Benjamin back and we continued to live in the Constant Spring
222 area until we left for Canada in March. He did not visit his son once since our separation nor
223 provide for any of his financial needs despite my pleas.

224 Despite our physical separation, Romain's aggression towards me persisted. During a telephone
225 call he threatened to inject me with Modecate and said that he would take "revenge" on me. In a
226 separate phone call, after I told him his mother called me a 'slut', he told me he defended her
227 behavior and threatened revenge saying I would feel every inch of pain I caused his mother. My
228 fear did not crystalize until one of our last conversations when he started to pressure me to have
229 an abortion. While he had initially been supportive of the pregnancy, it was clear to me that this
230 was no longer the case. He told me I was not mentally competent to continue the pregnancy

231 without a heavy dosage of more psychotropic drugs. All of this together with his previous threat
232 and Dr. Martin making it clear that Romain had the power as my next of Kin to have me
233 hospitalized, made it clear to me that I was not safe, that my son was not safe with him and that
234 my unborn child was not safe. I had no choice but to forge his signature on Benjamin's travel
235 consent for his visa application because I knew that he would suspect I was trying to escape
236 Jamaica and would refuse to provide his consent, not because he cares about his son or wants a
237 relationship with him but out of revenge. I had a valid American visa but the discussion of travel
238 bans and the current hostility towards immigration in the U. S. cause me to believe that it was not
239 safe for me to seek asylum. In about the middle of February I applied for our Canadian visas. I
240 knew about LGBT Jamaicans seeking refuge in Canada and I knew that it had a really good
241 reputation for human rights.
242 My son and I left Jamaica on 10 March 2017.
243 We seek the protection of Canada.