

# nexus

## **Memorandum**

**To:** Patricia Hessler, Executive Counsel, DCYF

Kevin Aucoin, Interim Director, DCYF

Mike Burk, Legislative Director/Assistant to the Director, DCYF

**From:** Nicholas Alahverdian, Policy Director, Nexus Government

**Re:** Recollections of Manatee Palms

**Advisory:** Strong language

This memo will attempt to convey the abuse that I suffered at the hands of employees of Manatee Palms Youth Services, financed by the State of Rhode Island. On a comparative scale, if what I've experienced were hurricanes, these situations would be most aptly be characterized as a Katrina-like set of incidents and storms with no help from the government (or at least until I was rescued by my Rhode Island caseworker, Patricia Chabot, who I credit with saving my life). These incidents, comprehensively and cumulatively, forced me into a state of severe existential despair; however, this response shall focus on the physical suffering that I sustained during these injurious and and hurtful occurrences. That said, notwithstanding the emotional abuse, I will focus on the physical abuse and its effects while not dismissing said emotional damage.

An assault exacted upon me merely a week into my stay at Manatee Palms was only the tip of the iceberg. An employee of said agency, Jason William, did strike me repeatedly in a violent and vile fashion. The expression on his face was pure fury. Repeatedly, he struck me fiercely, each blow varying in agonizing aching pain. I specifically recall after each pounding thrash the pulsating and palpating physiological stinging, the throbbing, gnawing instant soreness even as my screams pleaded with Jason to stop. Each punch was deliberate and each kick as I lay on the ground, screaming, concomitantly caused further physical discomfort.

I recall fellow patients observing this incident in a state of shock. The looks of terror only heightened my already elevated anxiety. Each whack, kick, and jab met my face with vigor, with every sturdy strike radiating from excruciating to intolerable. I felt sore for weeks. My bruised body sustained what can most aptly be characterized as the utility of an industrial punching bag. The inflammation, redness, and sensitivity around the areas

where I was struck by Jason gave my body a shoddy, inferior sensation, bringing my definition of corporal pain to an advanced and unfamiliar magnitude. This was only the beginning.

The culture of Manatee Palms was not unlike that of what is exhibited in the film *Fight Club*. The excessive, nearly inhuman paradigm of assault from Jason, Justin, Leroy, Marty, Cliff, and Richard only enhanced the permissibility of fights solely among patients. I specifically recall my endurance of pain to systematically increase upon each demonstrative occasion of a brawl. At times, the bashes and clobbers would propel and evolve to a state of restraint, typically following two to two and half minutes of pure and unadulterated punches and kicks. Comparatively, the restraints were, from an obviously abstract point of view, more comfortable due to the lack of frequency of strikes which were replaced with the restriction of body movement.

The instances of the “necessity” of fighting and subsequent restraints were initiated by various motives with the objective of inflicting pain on my person. Such activity as that of refusing to go to bed or follow an instruction provided to them what was a warranted rationale to initiate a violent melee complete with the onslaught of assault. The bombardment of smacks and whipped fists provided not merely an alternative to the instigation of the introductory phase of restraint, but suitably and advantageously permitted the assaults to appear to the senses solely as the common struggle and scuffle to physically coerce the patient (i.e., me) to violently land on the floor.

The staff, composed of many recent high school grads and many thugs who talked incessantly about gangs and crime, were particularly infuriated when a staff member named Rhonda was fired, due to the fact that she sexually molested me, which she later admitted to and was fired for (as well as pleading guilty in court for this crime). Apparently, Rhonda had been friends with many of her fellow staff and my honesty was detrimental to her retaining employment with Manatee Palms. Justin kicked me in the groin several times, punched me, and choked me the day after I shed light on this sinister violation of trust and professionalism. Many other assaults followed. Rhode Island Family Court waited a few more months before Patricia Chabot was finally allowed to rescue me from this torture.

As my tolerance for pain grew, so did my assertiveness against the staff who inflicted it upon me. I persistently attempted to inform the administration of Manatee Palms of the daily and nightly explosions of violence. Therapists and the doctor never inquired about the blackened bruises from especially violent brawls, the discoloration formed an enveloping, intrusive layer of contusions.

The violent conflicts would last anywhere from two to two and a half minutes of the purest pain. These frequent battles were regularly accompanied by vicious and wicked verbal assaults- choice names such as “sissy,” “wimp,” “bitch-ass,” “motherfucker,” “white-ass bitch,” “cocksucker,” and “punk-ass bitch” were some of the more frequently used monikers. The kicks and punches were often verbalized in step with the syllabic structure of the words; that is to say with the utterance of each syllable, it was not uncommon for each verbally assaulting syllable to be met with its physical counterpart of a punch. For example, “punk-ass, bitch-ass, white-ass motherfucker” would be a particularly harsh mash-up of syllabic assault intertwined with eight respective hits.

As the quarrels ensued, so did my subconsciously wrought explications meant to clarify the purpose for being attacked. As I lay on the ground screaming and crying, nose bloodied, tears sloping downward, I became accustomed to the systematic, nearly mechanized process of assault, restraint, and subsequent lockup in the “quiet room,” more often than not accompanied with a hearty dose of a chemical sedative.

The physical discomfort that I suffered was incalculable. As I mentioned earlier, my body would literally have a coating of blackness, purpleness, yellowness, and redness, hues I had never seen and colors I thought my body was incapable of producing. The ungodly frequency of migraines from hits in the head, which seemed to be Leroy’s favorite place to strike, was nearly unbearable. The joint pain, swelling, and sometimes immobility became a burden. It would become painful to stand from straight blows to the stomach, painful to walk from hits in the knee, painful to sit because of jabs to my ribcage, and uncomfortable to lie in the relative security of my bed due to my back being stepped on with steel-toe boots which Cliff seemed quite fond of.

I believe I would be a formidable contender for the competition of most nosebleeds in a one year period. All too often my clothing would be splattered with blood, I would wake up in the middle of the night with a pillow that took on fire-engine red appearance. Accompanied by the most arduous migraines, my nose would bleed and bleed. Not only was that a favorable place for the fellow patients to attack me, but it seemed to Leroy that I favored being hit in the face because he did it so often.

The disguise of struggle in anticipation of a restraint to mask the assaults does not adequately describe the strategic paradigm with which the assaults were employed. The forceful strikes were in such frequency that I do not believe I went a day without being bruised or attacked for a four to six month period. The daily coating of skin discoloration would be impossible to acquire solely from professional, therapeutic, safety-minded restraining measures. The dichotomous polarity of what this cohort of staff maliciously *committed* and what they were trying to *imply* are two opposing and dissimilar undertakings.

My body became one with the pain. The only way I feel that I can most aptly characterize this abhorrent infliction of pain on my person is to describe the pain as the antithesis of happiness, the polar oppose of elation. The suffering and agony necessitated that I develop physical coping mechanisms that would justify the assaultive nuisances that were recurrently transpiring. My body learned to interpret the pain as a distorted configuration of euphoric interpretation. Said another way, my body learned to welcome the pain instead of attempting to avoid it as it became such a habitual, daily (sometimes hourly) occurrence.

The seemingly preferred method of a fight would usually follow this formula:

1. A provocative event meant to disrupt the “stability” of the group of patients would occur. Typically, an instruction (some of which I viewed as pointless or issued with malice) would be given, and I would object. On many occasions, probably the most common dilemma that I faced was obtaining or retaining college view-books and application materials that were confiscated due to their “irrelevance to my treatment plan.”
2. An alternative would be given, such as an escort to the “quiet room,” more often than not peppered with curse words.
3. I would object to the alternative and attempt to peacefully discuss the issue.
4. A final warning would be given and I would typically remain seated while the staff members proceeded to kick me, grab my arms, punch me, in three instances bite me, grasp my neck so tightly that I felt as I was being deprived of oxygen, jab me in the chest, punch me in the nose, apply force to a pressure point, step on my hands, kick me in the face, place me on the ground with my stomach to the floor yet arms acrobatically holding down my own head, and multitudinous other forms of the most flawless, definitive forms of physical pain that went beyond my most dismal and pessimistic expectations.
5. After a couple of solid minutes of sheer terror, a restraint would ensue, a nurse would be called to administer a sedative, and I would be left for dead in the “quiet room.”

The unfortunate reality of this pain was the fact that I needed to constantly reassure myself that it would be the last time, always justifying the attacks as being my fault. The seemingly borderline personalities of the staff members were startling. There was no gray area- it was rather binary; that is to say my behavior would be good or bad, and they

came to work seeming to expect to initiate an impasse of my desire to meet their expectations. The kicks to the face and jabs to the chest were administered in even the most inferior situations, such as requesting more food or a drink of water after bedtime; the events would simply depend on their mood. The seemingly consistent vengeful attitude taken on by Richard and Justin would often result in the most simplistic requests being turned into the most complicated fights.

Richard, Justin, and Leroy (or any combination of the three) often worked as a team on the same shift. The vindictiveness with which they approached their responsibilities was abhorrent, I was frequently startled that their immaturity would be carried into the workplace. They seemed to have a particular impulse to exact revenge upon any patient who dared cross their path.

Cliff, in addition to his frequent sexual jokes and references, was notorious for assaulting patients during restraints. I know Cliff was fired for his behavior. His harmful behavior led me to pain on many occasions. His preferred manner of diabolical assault was to get me to ground as quick as possible and step on my face while alternating with blows from his fist. Cliff's monstrous acts were among some of the most despicable, leaving me with countless bruises, migraines, sore body parts, and a significant amount of occasions where I had trouble breathing due to the breath being knocked clear out of my lungs with the force of a bat to a baseball. Marty was not an actual employee of Manatee Palms, he was one of the 15 or so staff from the "agency," a temporary staff support firm that provided logistical support to the facility. Marty would be annoyed at the slightest of adverse circumstances, often simply slapping me. Marty was probably the least abusive of this cohort.

As I mentioned earlier, the incident with Jason was the tip of the iceberg as this initial assault sparked a chain of assaults that continued until the day I was court-ordered out of the facility. Justin was particularly and devilishly vengeful as he and Jason were friends. Richard also committed acts of retribution, albeit his were less severe than Justin's and were often only committed in the presence of Justin, often invoking the "esprit de corps" or *comitatus* of their united force against the white, minority patients.

In conclusion, my days at Manatee Palms were dark and filled with destructive and harmful behavior. Never in my life did I expect to be so horribly and atrociously hurt. The sinister paradox of being hurt by the people paid to take care of me was and is startling and disturbingly astonishing. I may have physically recovered from these assaults, but I sometimes have phantom pains and frightening phenomena where I visualize the blackening and purpling and yellowing of my skin where the bruises acquired by Manatee Palms staff once were. They are invisible bullet wounds of the most terrorizing battle I've ever experienced.