

**Interview with Daughter of Patient at Augusta State Hospital
Who Wishes to Remain Anonymous
[Patient from around 1930 - 1950]**

September 8, 2003

Interviewer: Diana Scully

DS: Tell me about your mother.

Daughter: ...She was a very intelligent woman, extremely intelligent, but what she had was these blackouts where she didn't know what she was doing. I remember as a small child, I must have been 4 or 5 years old, she put her head through a plate glass window. But I don't remember any blood or any cut glass or anything like that. She was deeply religious [and] played the piano just beautifully. She would come on holidays and everything. She was lucid, and she was smart, and like I said she was intelligent. She could name all our presidents and all that sort of thing, but the thing was she was dangerous to herself and to [unintelligible] with the blackouts. I don't remember anything happening to me that she might have done, but my aunt told my brother that she almost killed him a couple of times. My aunt was kind of a vindictive person, and I think it was a terrible thing for her to say to my brother. Now I'm going to tell you something. I have a brain tumor, but it's calcified; it's benign. My brother died of cancer of the brain. Now I'm wondering could my mother have had maybe a tumor or something like that that nobody knew at that time that caused the blackouts?

DS: Did they never figure it out?

Daughter: No, they didn't have MRIs and CAT scans and all that sort of thing in those days.

DS: When did she first go into the hospital?

Daughter: 1930, I think it was '29 or '30; I was in first grade.

DS: And then she stayed until?

Daughter: She was there until 1950 I would say. A long time: 20 years. She came out, and she lived to be 93. She was in a nursing home down in Gardiner. My father worked there [at Augusta State Hospital]. There never was any cruelty to patients that I knew of. It was supervised. He didn't have that much direct contact with the patients. He did mostly case histories and all that...

DS: Did your father work there after your mother went there?

Daughter: He worked there before she went there, and he and my grandmother got together and they decided the best thing the do was to institutionalize my mother because of these blackouts.

DS: How often did the blackouts happen?

Daughter: I really don't know...probably once every two weeks or once a month.

DS: Did they give her treatments for the blackouts while she was there?

Daughter: Not that I know of. They weren't into shock treatments at that time...And then, when they got the medication, I went to the doctors who were there. They were Dr. [unintelligible], Dr. Elkins, Dr. Marquardt, and Dr. Newman. Those were the four I remember the most. They were

very nice people...especially Dr. Elkins... I went to him and asked is there anything I should be worried about when I get married and have children. And he said, no.

DS: So did the problem with the blackouts stop?

Daughter: With the medication.

DS: What kind of medication was it?

Daughter: I have no idea. I think it was the same kind of medication they give them now to prevent seizures...We used to go up and get her for the holidays and bring her home with us... That's what really kept her going, I think was her relationships...My dad worked hard, and he was very good...at Christmas and the holidays. He lived there, and he had a little tree in his room that was just covered with gifts from relatives and patients. He was so good to the patients.

DS: You said he was a psychiatric nurse?

Daughter: He graduated up there, at Augusta State Hospital.

DS: Was that unusual at the time, for a man to be a psychiatric nurse?

Daughter: I guess so. I don't know...He didn't have much formal education, and I think that was something he wanted. His family were all woolen workers and weavers...

DS: So, if your dad lived there and your mom lived there...

Daughter: I lived with my mom's mother... You know, kids are cruel. They all knew my mother was in the state hospital.

DS: Did they make fun of you?

Daughter: Oh, sure they did. I was crazy like my mother, and all kinds of stuff like that.

DS: What did you do?

Daughter: There wasn't much I could do. I guess I cried. I had a teacher in the first grade who was wonderful to me, and I always loved and admired her...

DS: So would your father see your mother when he was working there?

Daughter: He used to go up and see her, and she wasn't very nice to him. He had my brother and I, and he assumed the responsibilities. A lot of men don't want to, but he did.

DS: Did your mother have to stay there? Was she committed?

Daughter: She could come home on visits...

DS: Do you remember going to visit your mother? What did you observe? What did you feel when you were there? What memories do you have?

Daughter: We used to go with my aunt, who recently passed away. She and I used to go up and get my mother, and it would be awfully cold and windy up on the hill, and we would get her, and bring her home. I remember one incident when she wouldn't go because she didn't get to go to mass. So I remember crying, with the tears freezing on my cheeks. It was traumatic. It wasn't a real happy childhood, but I don't feel sorry for myself. These are memories I've put to one side. This is good, that I'm talking about it; I think it's therapeutic.

DS: I think you mentioned it, how old were you when your mother went into the hospital?

Daughter: Five, just five.

DS: How about your brother? Was he a big brother, little brother?

Daughter: He was six, 18 months older than me.

DS: How many times a year did you see your mother after she went to Augusta State Hospital?

Daughter: A couple of times a year, and then I used to go up there and they didn't let me in.

DS: Why?

Daughter: Because I was a child. Even in the hospice they didn't let children in. So you'd stand by the window and wait. She'd be in the window and wave back.

DS: When your mother came out of the hospital, what happened? Did she and your father end up back together?

Daughter: No. My father lived with his sister and her husband...and my mother went into a nursing home...I remember when he passed away, my brother and I went to pick her up at this nursing home...She really wasn't upset, but as I said, she was very religious. He was going to go to heaven, you know? And when her mother passed away, they didn't even tell her, but that was cruel, because my mother, as I said before, was religious and it bothered her because my grandmother was a religious person, too, and died, and went to heaven, and that was it.

DS: Do you have any recollections or knowledge of the people who took care of your mother? What they were like? Did she make friends with any of the patients there?

Daughter: Yes, she did. She had one woman who lived on her floor. I don't remember her name. She was friendly with her. And my [unintelligible] was a beautician up there at the hospital, and she used to do my mother's hair...

DS: We're trying to get a sense of what life was like at the hospital.

Daughter: I don't know. I guess it must have been awfully boring. They had movies every week. They had a movie every Thursday night. We used to go and sit in the balcony, my friends and I.

DS: They let you go, family members?

Daughter: Yes, they let us go.

DS: Would your mother go to those movies?

Daughter: In the daytime, the patients went...and I think it was the help who went at night...We'd go at night. I remember Stella Dallas with Barbara Stanwyck. The people that were in the hospital, they used to let out on walks; they'd have attendants with them. And then some of them worked on the farm; they had a big farm there...

DS: So were you were aware of conversations among your mother's brothers, sisters, and parents when all this was happening and she had to go to the hospital?

Daughter: No. I remember when my mother used to come home on holidays she didn't pay much

attention to us kids. She talked with my grandmother all of the time about getting out of the hospital...

DS: What was scary about the blackouts?

Daughter: She put her head through the window that time. And then she did something to her eye...There was some things that she did to herself...But...that one episode when she put her head through the window...that's all I remember. Probably just as well. Those things were so traumatic for kids, but now I can look at it objectively. You're always kind of worrying, if something happens to you...When I was [young] I might have been a little embarrassed and ashamed that my mother was in the state hospital.

Diana: That's a natural thing. You said kids taunted you.

Daughter: Well, that was when I was little. I had a pretty good childhood. My father was wonderful; he was always there for us. He gave us whatever he could afford to give us. He used to...send orders up to my mother, like oranges...He'd send an order up every week. She resented him because of the fact that he put her in there. There was a lot of animosity there. I remember something else. He used to send away to Sears and Roebuck every year for what she needed. He was very good. He had a wonderful sense of humor...My mother had a pretty good sense of humor, considering all the facts and everything. But dad was great.

DS: I wonder when they met, and when they were courting, and early when they got married, if he ever knew about mental illness.

Daughter: My grandmother told him, but he was in love, I guess. I remember once she told me about a man she knew when she was young, and he was very nice...His daughter and I became pretty good friends. They went together, they became boyfriend and girlfriend for a while, and he proposed to her. She wouldn't marry him...My dad came along...and he passed the test.

DS: How long were they married before she went into the hospital?

Daughter: ...I know they were married 7 years before.

DS: It must have been a hard decision for your father.

Daughter: I guess. You mean to put her away? Yes, I would say so. He and my grandma would get together, and they would talk about it, and she said, "Well, I told you." Well, these are vague memories for me. I was about 5 years old. But I do remember certain things like that. And my father was worried about her...My brother lived with my grandmother practically all his life...