

When I struggled with my mental illness, the police helped



By **Guest Voices**

on August 16, 2016 at 8:56 AM, updated August 16, 2016 at 11:45 AM

By Jean Lufkin Boulter, a former reporter of The Birmingham News and author of *Chasing the Mockingbird – A Memoir of a Broken Mind*. Her website is jeanlufkinboulter.com.

I cringed when I read the story on [al.com about police shooting and killing people who were mentally ill](#). They could have shot me, too.

I was suffering from severe delusions after my paranoid schizophrenic brother died of lung cancer. I was walking down a country road in the wee hours of the morning trying to escape from imaginary evil forces when a sheriff's car stopped and put me in the back seat. My hands were bloody. I had fallen down an embankment covered with brambles.

They sternly asked why I was covered with blood. They called for back up. I was scared. But instead of pulling their guns, the officers called my husband. The next morning, he took me to a psychiatrist who put me in a hospital unit for the mentally ill, a locked ward. Thank goodness I was not put in a jail cell, which would have played into my delusions that I was in danger from the enemy. Jail would have meant that my paranoid thoughts were true.

Treatment started immediately. A psychiatrist and a psychologist met with me daily. I attended counseling sessions with other patients. At first I refused to take medications and faced a commitment hearing. My psychiatrist finally earned my trust and convinced me that the meds were my only option. Zyprexa for delusions and Zoloft for depression made me sane again.



Alabama jail expanding to handle influx of mentally ill

I was also fortunate that my family, friends and neighbors welcomed me back to the sane world. Their support helped me get beyond the most tragic period of my life. But the road to recovery is not always so easy. Patients and families struggle for years trying to overcome the nightmare of tortured minds. We need to give them every ounce of empathy we have and every chance there is to tackle this problem.

Police are doing the best they can but they don't have the resources and training to cope with the mentally ill. Often there are warning signals. The mentally ill person has not taken medication, or has been confronted with a troubling issue. There absolutely needs to be a number to call instead of 911. A trained professional could possibly head off a confrontation. We're spending the funds on law enforcement and jails, so why not just divert the money to an agency for the mentally ill? And provide a bed in a safe environment for those troubled people?

You probably know someone who's not quite right in the head. After all one in five people in the United States suffers from a mental health condition, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.



In Alabama police shootings, mental illness often a factor

Yet, we don't talk about it. The subject is taboo. Making mental health care accessible just seems beyond our conversations about politics and fundamental health goals. There remains a stigma that prevents us from addressing this illness that so often can be fixed, sometimes with a visit to a gifted psychiatrist, who then prescribes a miracle pill or two. The meds and counseling sessions can often heal a really sick mind.

Of course I know that there are many mean-spirited people out there. Some are mentally ill but the vast majority of mentally ill people are not evil; they're just sick. My brother, Joe, was a paranoid schizophrenic his entire adult life. He was the kindest, gentlest person you would ever meet. But his tortured mind was focused on another world where the enemy would get him. Yet, he never threatened to harm others.

Today, there are better medications and highly qualified professionals. If only we could get patients to them and offer treatment and pills to those sick people who desperately need them. We are all sympathetic to patients with heart disease or cancer. Why can't we embrace those with mental illness?

There are success stories out there. I have been well for 20 years.

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our **User Agreement** and **Privacy Policy**

© 2016 Alabama Media Group. All rights reserved (**About Us**).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Alabama Media Group.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

 **Ad Choices**