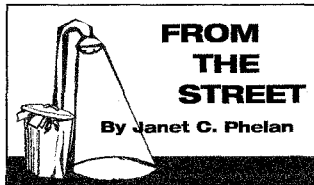


A beautiful mind? Man's credibility hurt by admitting delusions



Mick Morrissey's reputation preceded him. Several people had spoken to me about the brilliant young geneticist and how the military had cut him off at the knees.

His friend Kyle Coobs had told me Mick was the brightest person he had ever met. He said that Mick's research into "mad cow disease" had been actively discouraged by his government employer. Another friend countered that Mick was mentally ill, and was on experimental psychiatric medicine.

Neither report prepared me for the articulate, handsome red-haired 26-year-old who wandered into peace camp one

spring evening. He carried a sheath of papers detailing his personal passion — his detailing of the architectural symbolism embedded in free-masonry.

We walked around the university campus, built in an earlier century by the free-masons. He pointed out the prevalence of groups of sixes in windows and columns, and explained the significance of the strange animal carvings above the portals. We stood in front of the old city hall and he showed me the direct line-up of the front door with the front door of the old Masonic temple, miles across town.

On his urging, I downloaded a map of Washington, D.C. Connecting by lines the capitol, the memorials and the Masonic temple, I effectively produced a drawing of a Masonic symbol. "Magic," was how Mick explained the intent of embedding symbols in building plans.

Mick's former job, which led him to his research on Krutchfield-Jacob, or "mad-cow disease," indicated a genesis of the disease more sinister than an unfortunate and happenstance dietary contagion.

It was this discovery, and Mick's

attempts to "go public" with his findings, that had propelled Mick into homelessness.

The military, which had poured thousands of dollars into his education, informed him that he was to leave governmental employ. His social security number was canceled, leaving Mick unable to secure work. Nine months later, he was arrested for desertion and placed in a mental hospital, where he was plied with potent and experimental anti-psychotic medication.

He was then discharged, and Mick packed up and fled to California.

Tall and lanky, Mick had lost over 100 pounds in his first year of homelessness. "Homelessness does not agree with me," he said.

Then looking at me with a steely gaze, he announced, "I am a schizophrenic."

I was shocked that this brilliant young man would make a statement so completely undermining his credibility.

Fishing, I offered that the medicine must have helped him.

"I don't take it," he confessed. "It

makes me worse."

Confused, I asked what his symptoms were.

He said he had been told he was delusional.

His delusion? "They are really messing with me," he said sadly.

He then leaned toward me, and revealed the trade-off. "I can rent again."

Later that day, I spoke with Abby, a shelter employee, concerning Mick's embracing a diagnosis that destroyed his believability.

"It is probably healthier for him to do so," she said carefully.

I ran into Mick one more time, just as I was leaving town. He was sitting outdoors on a bench, alone.

I saluted him, a fallen soldier in the hidden war.

(Janet C. Phelan is an university graduate and experienced freelance writer. She has been homeless in Santa Monica for a year).