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On Mental Health

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Learning from Britney's Troubles

By Mia Fontaine



The involuntary hospitalization of Britney Spears last week brought back memories. Ten years ago, when I was 15, I was a high school dropout and heroin addict, living in the back of a dealer's van. My mom first noticed red flags at 14: rapid weight loss, self-mutilation, coming home high, irregularly showering. The therapist she had me see, as well as my school counselor, believed that, cutting aside, my actions were typical teenage behavior. The first time I ran away, though, my mother formed her own conclusions, and got a 5150 issued—California code for the involuntary 72-hour

psychiatric hold that Ms. Spears was under, before she left the hospital on Wednesday.

I wish I had seen my first, forced hospitalization as the gift it was.

For Ms. Spears, when the 72 hours called for under the 5150 order ended last Sunday, one of three things could have happened: she could have signed herself out or voluntarily committed herself, or doctors at her hospital could have issued another hold, called a 5250, after determining she was “gravely disabled.”

Curiously, the paparazzi—often blamed for contributing to Ms. Spears's problems—may well have helped with the solution this time: they provided ample documentation to support the doctors' decision to issue a 5250, which can extend a hold as long as 14 days. For patients whose every move isn't followed and recorded, however, an extension is exceedingly difficult to obtain. Unlike the 5150, which can be issued by any qualified California officer or clinician, the extended hold must be upheld by a court-appointed commissioner.

Involuntary hospitalization becomes still more complicated when you're dealing with bipolar disease, the very nature of which is cyclical. Being crazy doesn't make you stupid. As long as you refrain from attempting suicide, homicide or any other documentable action (legally, there needs to be “specific and articulable” evidence of your inability to function normally to continue a hold), you're free to sign yourself out. Which, 14 days after my admittance, I did, despite my mother's protests.

As a minor, I would have needed parental consent to get a tattoo, yet when it came to my mental health, the law put me, a drug-addled teenager, in complete control. Only

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Mission Statement

As women of today we want to improve the lives of women of tomorrow by increasing awareness and knowledge of mental health issues. We wish to remove the stigma of mental illness by educating the public. It is also our goal to encourage women through a holistic approach to mental health care which acknowledges everyone's physical, mental, and spiritual needs.

To Become A Member

For information and to receive a membership brochure, please call Rachel Peniche at 858.514.5153, or visit our website at www.vistahill.org.

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The Vista Hill Foundation is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing excellence in behavioral health care for the people of San Diego County.



Membership Benefits

All memberships are renewable on a yearly basis. Enjoy Women's Council on Mental Health (WCMH) programs at a reduced rate and support Vista Hill. Join today!

\$50 Ruby Level

- 20% discount on tickets to WCMH programs and Q&A forums featuring nationally-recognized experts, authors and celebrities
- Subscription to bi-annual newsletter
- A distinctive and elegant goldtone membership pin

\$100 Pearl Level-New!

- Invitation to complimentary "Coffee & Conversation" gatherings
- Listing in Vista Hill's Annual Donor Report
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\$250 Sapphire Level

- Preferred seating at all programs
- Invitation to special receptions with guest speakers
- All Ruby & Pearl Level benefits

\$500 Emerald Level

- Emerald Member listing in Women's Council event programs
- Invitation to special receptions with guest speakers
- 2 complimentary VIP tickets to programs
- Prominent VIP seating at all programs
- All Ruby & Pearl Level benefits

\$1,000 Diamond Level

- Diamond Member listing in Women's Council event programs
- Invitation to you and your guests to special receptions with guest speakers
- 4 complimentary VIP tickets to programs, with complimentary valet parking
- Prominent VIP seating at all programs
- All Ruby & Pearl Level benefits

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when I landed in a Utah jail with felony drug charges was I finally compelled to receive treatment. By chance, the state I was in at the time of my arrest was one of the few that gave parents the ability to put children in treatment over their objections.

This reality is at odds with the popular conception, abetted by Hollywood movies, of involuntary commitment (sane people being forced into psychiatric hospitals is a horror film staple, after all). Oddly enough, it was a former actor, Ronald Reagan, who did much to restrict its use. As California's governor in 1967, Mr. Reagan signed a law that set a national precedent of required judicial hearings for extended involuntary commitment (the 5250) and the prohibition of forced medication, among others.

Hamstrung by the new laws, parents of mentally ill and drug-addicted young adults can now do little but stand by helplessly. What's more, bizarre behavior once limited to adolescents—sudden weight loss, public temper tantrums, gruesome exhibitionism—are enshrined on the covers of *Us Weekly* and *Star*. (It's a sad paradox that Ms. Spears fell prey to the culture she was helping create.)

Ms. Spears's situation outlines the dangers of blurring the line between socially celebrated behavior and behavior with profound psychological causes. And while her friends and relatives (and a world of transfixed fans) seem to be able to differentiate between the two, and recognize that Ms. Spears needs help, now our legal system can't or doesn't care to treat someone until he or she has endangered others or themselves, often irreversibly.

Granted, the laws that once allowed us to force adults into treatment could be abused: extreme electroshock therapy, lobotomies, philandering husbands committing their wives, embarrassingly promiscuous daughters being locked up. But in trying to eliminate the possibility that someone could be wrongly committed, we have cast out Britney Spears, and others much less famous, from the heavens where they might have been helped.

They need to be brought back.

Reprinted with permission of Mia Fontaine, OP-ED contributor at *The New York Times* and co-author of the memoir *Come Back: A Mother and Daughter's Journey Through Hell and Back*. This article was printed February 10, 2008.

Recommended Reading

Wishful Drinking

by Carrie Fisher

Moments of Clarity:

Voices from the Front Lines of Addiction and Recovery

by Christopher Kennedy Lawford



When You Love Someone Who Is Addicted...

By Matthew R. Zetumer, M.D.

The forty-something-year-old attorney sitting across from me was so earnest and genuinely distressed by his circumstances that it took little encouragement from me to have him tell his story. The last three years of his life had been, as he described it, “a living hell.” His wife of twelve years, a research scientist, had elected to remain at home the past eight years to raise their two children, a boy 8 and a girl 5. But beginning two and a half years ago, he began to notice changes taking place in her.

When he came home from work she might still be in pajamas with the house a mess and occasionally she repeated herself. He felt guilty pointing these things out to her because he loved her dearly, and she was, in all respects, an excellent wife and mother. His discontent only increased when she would respond defensively that she was under a great deal of stress, and that he was too busy with his career to know how difficult it was raising two children, especially the boy who had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. He had to admit to himself that she was right.

He found himself secretly resenting her and gradually became aware of the emotional gap that was widening between them. They rarely discussed things other than the children, and their sex life was becoming non-existent. He noticed in the evenings his wife was often tired and had a glazed look. She began to fall asleep before their son went to bed stating that she had had a hard day and was exhausted.

Their situation reached a crescendo when he discovered a box hidden in their closet. Inside were two bottles of pills. Before confronting his wife, he



Suggestions:

If you suspect a love one is addicted:

- 1) Help arrange for a screening.
- 2) Seek professional help and include other immediate family members.
- 3) Go on line to www.drugfree.org.
- 4) Let your loved one know that you will be supportive.

If you suspect that you are addicted:

- 1) Remember that you are not alone.
- 2) Remember that you are not guilty.
- 3) Remember that you are not a bad person.
- 4) Go on line to www.drugfree.org.

looked on the internet and found that the medication was hydrocodone. He called a friend who was an orthopedist and heard that hydrocodone was an analgesic, a pain killer, and an opiate. His wife was addicted to opiates!

Armed with this knowledge, he confronted her. Initially she merely smiled, and in a somewhat patronizing way told him that this was old medication left over from sinus surgery. He wanted to believe her, but something told him otherwise. Over the next three hours she told him so many lies that she forgot where one lie ended and the next began. Finally her house of cards came tumbling down, and she admitted to taking 10 hydrocodone daily. She was addicted, hated herself, and said she would taper off the medicine over the next two weeks. He was thrilled.

Over the next three months, he alternated between scrutinizing her every move and feeling like he was walking on eggshells. When she was tired, he asked if she was still “using the pills.” She always denied this. She would then attack him saying that he

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“Coffee & Conversation”

We welcome Women’s Council members from the \$100 Pearl Level and up to join us Thursday, February 5, 2009 at 10:30 a.m. at the Vista Hill office (8787 Complex Drive, Suite 200, San Diego CA, 92123) for the next “Coffee and Conversation.” We will be discussing Claire and Mia Fontaine’s book, *Come Back: A Mother and Daughter’s Journey Through Hell and Back*. Books are currently available for \$18. Please call Rachel Peniche at 858.514.5153 to rsvp for February 5th or to purchase the book. We look forward to sharing your insights!





SAVE THE DATE

Women's Council On Mental Health Lunch Program

We hope you will come and hear Claire and Mia Fontaine's inspiring story on Wednesday, March 4, 2009, 11:00 am- 1:30 pm at the Hyatt Regency La Jolla. Sponsorship opportunities, tables and individual seats are available. Individual seating begins at \$65. Paid in advance reservations are required. Please call or email Rachel Peniche at 858.514.5153 or rpeniche@vistahill.org

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was a nag and not being supportive. He felt more and more guilty, was anxious at work, and was preoccupied thinking about his wife and children. His work began to suffer.

One evening he noticed a bureau drawer slightly open. His heart sank when he found three more bottles and 183 hydrocodone. After a heated confrontation, his wife broke down crying and admitted to taking 35-40 tablets daily. She had been doing this for the past two years. She felt totally out of control and did not know what to do.

After hearing his story, I told him I would need to evaluate his wife and

that if both of them were willing to work hard, there were good treatments available. They had every reason to be hopeful.



Matthew R. Zetumer, M.D., National Football League Program for Substances Abuse/Western Regional Psychiatrist. Dr. Zetumer is a member of the Friends of Vista Hill Advisory Board



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