

"Many Thousands Gone"*

I died while waiting to be ready,
while waiting to get a goal
that would tell you what I wanted to do.
You couldn't help me until then, you said,
closing your file, with a smile.

I died while being assessed
for appropriateness, for hygiene, for my sartorial status,
even for my handshake and my smile.
"Do you have any front teeth left dear? That's so important IF you
want to get a job!"
I left, knowing that you hadn't even really seen me,
I died of embarrassment then, learning once more that
I do not rate even the most minimal of courtesies.

I died while you were confidently teaching me
those all important "social skills."
The ones you already had.
The ones that would allow me to obtain a "valued social role."
Like you, apparently already had.
I must have the devalued one, then
The one that enables you
to get your paycheck.

And I died again while taking the tests that I always came up short on.
An IQ test, a TAT, a Rorschach test, a personality test, a GAF,
whatever that is.
I died while you judged me lacking in a thousand ways,
and kept on judging me.
Once or twice or thrice wasn't enough for you,
Oh no, you always wanted to "evaluate" me some more,
it paid your bills.
Too bad, after I was dead,
you couldn't evaluate me more.

I died while not being "a good self reporter."
I died while "splitting staff"; while being too "high functioning" or
too "low functioning";
while being "entitled" which had replaced "manipulative,"
while being called "disordered" and "disorganized"
along with my "non-compliant treatment resistance" !
Cripes! I died
then.

But for you the crucial question remained; was I really malingering?
Didn't I really just want to be this way?
You asked that in your treatment team meetings,
and in your corridors. I heard it, even though I hadn't been invited.
I died when

You mistook your cultural biases for clinical judgment.
I died while dangling at the end of a rope called my diagnosis, or
diagnoses.
[A long rope where anything and everything that I was or I am or will
ever is strangled by who I might have been or have become or be now
and forever amen]

I died then.

I died especially hard while waiting for affordable housing.
I was number 5, 487 on the list on the day I died.
That day I stood at the last pay phone in existence spending my last
quarters and dimes
only to punch in the wrong number and get disconnected once more

I died again because I complained about being abused by my staff.
The authorities investigated and I got a letter back I couldn't even
read.
So I asked my staff to read it
(A kind one, they do exist you know) She said it was
Unsubstantiated.
When I asked her what that meant she said that they believed the other
person and not me.
She said, I had to have a witness.
So, my word wasn't good enough. I died then.

I died while waiting for my Social Security benefits to come through.
For the final appeal that wasn't in time.
It took two years and in the meantime I died.
My family was so tired out trying to take care of me by then
they didn't even come to my funeral.
They were too tired to cry when I died.

I died while waiting for legal aid.
And then I died once I got it because I got it from you,
you didn't fight for me.
You just rubber stamped what my doctor said. I died then.
You didn't believe me. You didn't believe in me.

I died while waiting to be treated for my addictions.
They said they couldn't help me because I was too mentally ill.
But the mental health people said I needed to get sober first,
so around and around I went until I died.
It still happens today - only with the words:
"Not our client, not our patient", don't think it doesn't happen, don't.
And they sent me back to the prison, or off to the nursing home. Where

I died, because I didn't belong there, either.

I died while trying to convince the Rehab. folks that "Yes! I can work!
I'm OK just the way I am. Let me try!!"
They wouldn't, and so I died.

I died when the battered women's shelter threw me out.
And reported me to the child abuse and neglect services. Who took my
kids
because they said that love wasn't enough and I couldn't take care of
them properly.

[Don't they think I knew that? Don't they think I would have taken
their help? They said I was "too sick".
I died from not having enough food for them or furniture or clothes,
or a stable roof.]

I found out that people with my disability didn't deserve help.
I couldn't get help so I died.

And if I got it, I couldn't use it the way you thought I should. I
didn't do it right.

And so I lost it, again and again and again.

I died a living death.

I didn't die in the state hospital though. You wouldn't let me. Oh no.
Instead. I died "In the community" on the streets living out "learned
helplessness" that no one ever thought to ask, who taught it to me?

Please remember that the institution that you claim you released me from
is not a place but an attitude.
A special rung in hell where we can all get stuck.
and get unstuck with a little help from our friends!

Naomiruth, November, 2005, West Haven VA, CT

* The title is a refrain taken from an African-American spiritual entitled “No More Auction Block for Me.”