

TO BE A MENTAL PATIENT

To be a mental patient is to be stigmatized, ostracized, socialized, patronized, psychiatrized.

To be a mental patient is to have everyone controlling your life but you. You're watched by your shrink, your social worker, your friends, your family. And then you're diagnosed as paranoid.

To be a mental patient is to live with the constant threat and possibility of being locked up at any time, for almost any reason.

To be a mental patient is to live on \$82 a month in food stamps, which won't let you buy Kleenex to dry your tears. And to watch your shrink come back to his office from lunch, driving a Mercedes Benz.

To be a mental patient is to take drugs that dull your mind, deaden your senses, make you jitter and drool and then you take more drugs to lessen the "side effects."

To be a mental patient is to apply for jobs and lie about the last few months or years, because you've been in the hospital, and then you don't get the job anyway because you're a mental patient. To be a mental patient is not to matter.

To be a mental patient is never to be taken seriously.

To be a mental patient is to be a resident of a ghetto, surrounded by other mental patients who are as scared and hungry and bored and broke as you are.

To be a mental patient is to watch TV and see how violent and dangerous and dumb and incompetent and crazy you are.

To be a mental patient is to be a statistic.

To be a mental patient is to wear a label, and that label never goes away, a label that says little about what you are and even less about who you are.

To be a mental patient is to never to say what you mean, but to sound like you mean what you say.

To be a mental patient is to tell your psychiatrist he's helping you, even if he is not.

To be a mental patient is to act glad when you're sad and calm when you're mad, and to always be "appropriate."

To be a mental patient is to participate in stupid groups that call themselves therapy. Music isn't music, it's therapy; volleyball isn't sport, it's therapy; sewing is therapy; washing dishes is therapy. Even the air you breathe is therapy and that's called "the milieu."

To be a mental patient is not to die, even if you want to -- and not cry, and not hurt, and not be scared, and not be angry, and not be vulnerable, and not to laugh too loud -- because, if you do, you only prove that you are a mental patient even if you are not.

And so you become a no-thing, in a no-world, and you are not.

Rae Unzicker 1984