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Understanding schizophrenia is start of healing process

Isabella R. Moyer | May. 23, 2012 NCR Today

Some crimes are so horrific that even the most Christian of hearts struggle to find forgiveness. On July 30, 2008, Vince Li beheaded 22-year-old Tim McLean, a fellow passenger on a Greyhound bus in Manitoba, Canada. A psychiatric assessment concluded Li was suffering from untreated schizophrenia. The murder was the result of a severe psychotic episode. He was found not criminally responsible and admitted to the Selkirk Mental Health Centre for treatment.

Public reaction continues to reflect misunderstanding of mental illness in general and schizophrenia in particular. When a review board first allowed Li supervised walks on the grounds of the Mental Health Centre, media focused on the anger and fears of local residents. The same review board has now recommended supervised walks in the town of Selkirk. Again, local media found no shortage of residents willing to voice their opposition on public airwaves.

Chris Summerville, the CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada, has been visiting Li on a regular basis. His latest interview [1] took place Saturday, and CBC has made parts of the transcript public. Summerville believes the perception of Vince Li is "rooted in fear and in some people, in hate and in vengeance. [People] hold a characterization of him that is just not true of him."

Summerville is intentional in keeping the reality of both families of this tragedy always before him.

> Before I do any interview regarding the Greyhound Bus tragedy, I always ask myself, "What if it had been my 25-year-old daughter?"
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> My sympathy to Ms. de Delley [Tim McLean's mom] and her family are real. And yet, I also ask, "What if it had been my son who had killed Tim McLean in such a ghastly and grotesque fashion?"
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> I hope that such self-questioning softens my response to the many questions I have been asked about my personal and professional knowledge of Mr. Li.

The only way to overcome our fear is through understanding. Vince Li suffered from an untreated mental illness. With proper treatment and care, schizophrenia can be controlled, and this is what Summerville is trying to help us understand. He states, "Of the 300,000 people in Canada who live with some form of schizophrenia, the vast majority lead quiet, law abiding lives hoping for some quality of life. People living with schizophrenia are more likely to be victims of violence rather than being perpetrators of violence. Schizophrenia is treatable. Recovery is possible."

In the interview, Vince Li acknowledges the horror of his actions, actions he himself cannot forgive or forget. The compassionate thing to do is to seek healing for him, and for all those affected by the events of that horrendous day.

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[1] http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/story/2012/05/22/mb-vince-li-schizophrenia-interview-manitoba.html