

Seventeen-year-old John is a high school senior, a talented guitarist and basketball player. For several months, however, his family and friends had noticed his growing social withdrawal, plummeting grades, and uncharacteristic suspicion and odd statements. He would stand up and abruptly leave the classroom, and by the beginning of his senior year, he refused to attend school. He had started to believe that cameras were tracking him in the classroom and at home. John confided to his mother that he “might be going crazy.”

John’s school counselor was notified by his teachers that he wasn’t doing as well and was acting strangely in the classroom. She wasn’t sure what to do, so she encouraged the family to seek help and let John know that he was going to try harder or he might not make it through school. John’s mother, JoAnne, recognized a problem and was eager to find help, while his father, Peter, felt his son was being defiant and undisciplined. Furthermore, Peter was a fifth-generation farmer, and saw his son as behavioral problems that John needed to recognize and change right away, in order to get back to his portion of the work on the family farm. Although JoAnne really wanted to get her son help and had a feeling he really needed it, she was fearful that he might go the route of her mother, who had spent decades in a state hospital. These hospitalizations were scary for the family and had created significant mistrust between the family and the local mental health agency. Since her husband was not supportive, she didn’t push the issue too much, especially after she called the insurance company and they said it would take three months to see a psychiatrist. She also called the local mental health center but they said because they had private insurance they did not qualify for their services.

Finally, after a lot of discussion and ongoing bad grades, the family found a private counselor who began seeing John. The counselor didn’t have much experience with the types of issues John was experiencing, but thought it might be alcohol and drugs so she encouraged an

alcohol and drug assessment. The family took John to the assessment but it was inconclusive and he denied using. Meanwhile, John dropped out of school. The parents were horrified when John missed graduation. They couldn't seem to get him out of bed and his conversation was increasingly bizarre. Finally recognizing they had a serious problem, they called the mental health center. They were told that John had to initiate the request himself and that they did not take private insurance. The parents researched how to change him to Medicaid, but he would have to be on federal disability to qualify. They didn't know how to make that happen and also didn't think their son should go.

Not knowing what to do, the family turned to their friends and their church, and they prayed. The minister stopped by and gave John a lecture and prayed with him. None of it seemed to do any good. In the next two years, John became more and more isolated and paranoid. He lived in his bedroom, and the parents continued to argue about whether to kick him out, how to hold him accountable and how to get help. The mother lost her job because she was taking so much time off.

Finally after two years, John's health had been severely affected. He was refusing to eat because he thought the food was poisoned, and when it got to a severe level, his parents took him to the emergency room where he was involuntarily committed. This involved him being stripped naked and put in handcuffs. On the psychiatric unit he was forced to take medicine which caused him to be extremely sedated and feeling not like himself. They spoke with the parents but offered little information. He was transferred to the state hospital three hours from his home, so his parents arranged to take time off to visit every two weeks. Eventually he began to have conversations that made sense and he was told that he had a lifelong illness and would need to be on medicine for the rest of his life. He was discharged after two months to his parents' house

and referred to the local mental health center. This time the mental health center helped him get on federal disability. He saw a case manager every two weeks who asked about his medicine and talked a little bit about his goals and living situation. He saw the doctor every two months. He lived with his parents for the next three years, after which they helped him move into an apartment, and with the mental health center, helped him get subsidized housing. He was interested in finishing school or working, but he was told that he needed to manage his stress and that he was doing well. It was a pretty boring life, though. He did return to church and volunteered, but felt profoundly unhappy. Eventually because he felt better, he went off of his medicine and ended up back in the hospital.