

Ruthann Clenney
6755 State Road
Burtchville, MI 48059

I'm testifying from my personal experience living with mental illness.

I was raised on a small farm in the thumb of Michigan. It was a very safe environment. Our family had very little in the way of material possessions, but our parents would do without to provide for their children.

I married in 1962 at a very young age. My husband's mother was in her third marriage by this time. He had two older brothers who were raised by their father in California, and three half siblings living with their mother in Michigan. My husband had moved between Michigan and California a couple of times during his teens, living with his father and brothers in California, and his siblings here in Michigan.

I noticed behavior early in our marriage that was far from what I was used to, for example gambling, staying out late, not coming home, and not holding a job, but I thought it was because of him being young. I later found that this behavior was due to his diagnosis of bi polar disorder.

There were periods of time that were fairly normal. He would hold a job for a year or so, but he always seemed to be unsettled, looking to move jobs or residence.

By 1971 we had three children and things got worse fast. He was working at Detroit Diesel by that time.

- The gambling was weekly and started each week on payday. He would often lose his entire paycheck and stay away for up to three days at a time. We lived in Brighton Township and we only had one car, so when he was gone, the children and I couldn't go anywhere, no school events, grocery store, nowhere. Brighton was four miles away and the school was about nine miles away. I struggled to feed and clothe our family.
- Our house burned down while we were away, which I found out seven or eight years later, he had hired someone to set the fire.
- One of his older brothers shot his wife across a five lane highway while she was running for help and killed her. He then killed himself leaving two little boys. His family never talked much about this. I know he had been hospitalized for a short time, but I never heard what the diagnosis was.
- Everything in our family centered on my husband and his needs. As our children grew he disciplined harder. They couldn't make any noise if he was sleeping and he told them they didn't need to have fun when they were teenagers among other things.
- He was mentally and emotionally abusive to our children and myself, and as time went on, he became physically abusive to me. He started to choke me one time, but let me go before I passed out, he kicked me to the floor. When he would get angry he would throw dishes, furniture, even a small riding lawn mower, put holes in walls, and broke windows. I didn't

confide in anyone about what was happening in the home. I know now that this is typical in abusive situations.

- He missed a lot of time from work and in order to keep his job he went for counseling so the time would be covered as a medical leave and he would not be terminated. He knew the system and how to work it. I also went to his counselor, which helped me to cope with our situation, but he didn't want me to go, so I stopped. He was very controlling.
- He was hospitalized at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak on the psychiatric floor, but he got angry with the doctor after two days and checked himself out. He was diagnosed with bi polar disorder during this hospital stay.
- He tried to commit suicide with pills. Our twelve year old daughter and I found him. The second time he sat in the garage with the car running. I took him to St. Mary's Hospital in Livonia. He got angry with the nurses after two days and walked out of the hospital at midnight in a driving rain storm.
- He would get physically abusive with the two boys and he once told our daughter that he would kill her cat. Our children each left home shortly after high school. They all loved their father but were tired of the abuse.
- After leaving Detroit Diesel his jobs consisted of working in gas stations and delivering newspapers. He could not hold down a job because of the manic and depressive cycles of the illness. I worked full time starting in 1976 in order to help support our family.
- He first left our family in 1983 for three weeks without letting me know where he was, he only left a short note stating he was leaving us. He again left for several weeks in 1986. The last time was in 1991 at which time he had an address in Oregon. I divorced him in 1991 after 29 years of marriage.
- Our sons were afraid he would hurt me at the time of the divorce and hid the hunting rifles. And up to the time of his death in 2007, he moved residences often. He married and divorced once, and I know of one sexually obscene phone call he made.

The reason I'm testifying today is because I don't know what would have happened to our children if I had not been there for them. I was not the perfect spouse or mother, but I was always there for my family and my children knew I would support and protect them.

Also, the mentally ill seem to have the rights and protection. I was responsible for any debt or anything else he did, but unable to get information. I remember one day he had a doctor's appointment and I suspected he didn't keep the appointment. When I called to ask if he had kept the appointment, the doctor's office wouldn't even say that he was a patient there which I knew he was, and this was before the HIPAA law took effect.

I understand the mentally ill need help, but the family members, spouses, children, parents, and siblings need support. Who holds the mentally ill accountable for their actions? My husband would not stay on medication when it was prescribed for him. As a family member, it feels like the mentally ill are in control and running the whole situation, while the family is struggling trying to survive.