

## Mental Patients' Liberation: Why? How?

Inside the hospital, of course, mental patients are a recognizable group with a recognizable identity: that of victims in a living hell. The need to liberate our brothers and sisters on the inside needs no explanation.

As a long-range solution, mental patient's liberation means ending all involuntary commitment of law-abiding people, thereby restoring one of America's most fundamental and most important promises. But the hospital doors are still locked and you are still inside. In our consciousness-raising sessions, we have discussed how we got in, and how we got out, and we have discovered that all of us got out by learning to tell the doctors what they wanted to hear. We call it "learning to shuffle." We discovered, in sharing our experiences, that when we loudly proclaimed (in the hospital)

that we were not sick and that the doctors should leave us alone, we were rewarded with forced hypodermic injections of Thorazine and trips to the seclusion room, but when we learned to say humbly "I was sick, but with my doctor's help I'm getting well," our imprisonment neared its end. You will have the satisfaction of knowing which is truth and which is falsehood, and of knowing that although they have imprisoned your body, they do not have your mind.

The problems of the ex-patient are more subtle but no less pressing. Many ex-patients try to cope with what has happened to them by pretending that the experience never occurred. However, because the experience of having once been a mental patient teaches you to think of yourself as less than human, this is not a satisfactory solution. People feel emotions. They are justifiably happy or sad, angry, calm, elated, and so forth. As patients, however, we were taught to think of ourselves as permanently crippled, and we tend to react to the normal ups and downs of life as affirmations of our secret deformity. In addition, society imposes penalties upon ex-patients which affect you whether or not you acknowledge your identity. For the rest of your life, you will lie on applications for jobs, schools, and driver's licenses,



we loudly proclaimed (in the hospital)



and worry about being found out. Your friends and acquaintances will be divided into two groups, those who know and those who don't, and it will always be necessary to watch what you say to the latter.

Ex-patients are full of anger at what has been done to them, but alone and unorganized this anger is not expressed and is often turned inward against oneself. Our anger is the fuel of our movement, and when we come together, acknowledging our identity to ourselves and to teach other, we will have made the first and largest step in striking back at our oppressors.

("Mental Patients' Liberation: Why? How?" was originally distributed in the early 1970s by Mental Patients' Resistance of Brooklyn, New York.)