



crazy is as crazy does

Written by bubba



I've had a lot of people ask me my take on the psychological condition of that wingnut that killed 30+ people on the Virginia Tech campus this week, Cho Seung-Hui. Not because I'm any kind of expert or anything, but I worked in chronic mental health for a few years, before politics, back when I was a social worker. Part of my job was to be on call for 24 hour crisis shifts. If there was a situation where someone may need

to be hospitalized – by their own will or against – we would go out and assess the situation, try and control it if that was possible, and hospitalize the patient if it wasn't. Here is a partial list of calls I went on during that time:

***One patient was shot multiple times in the chest by a California highway patrolman.***

***Another took a trailer park hostage with a machete and a machine gun.***

***One of my favorite patients tried to suffocate her granddaughter with a pillow.***

***There were countless suicidal gestures and/or attempts with a wide range of severity.***

I really wish I would have kept a journal back then. I know I started to, but I'm unsure where it is or how far I actually got with it. At some point all the oddities became fixture and nothing seemed worthy of its own entry; the weirdness became normal. Suffice is to say that nothing really surprises me about the VA Tech guy. He was clearly schizophrenic with delusions of paranoia, persecution, grandeur and so on. Almost nobody really understands or has an interest in learning about major mental illness until something catastrophic happens. Then, all the horrible what's and why's are so hopelessly foreign to everyone's usual daily living that people's need to cope drives them on a futile quest to try and understand.



Because public comprehension around how the mind is founded, bent and maintained over time is so thin, what usually happens is that fear reigns and people lash out through cries for more gun control, heightened security and stiffer penalties for offenders. Any of those things really address the problem and/or make us safer? Maybe. Maybe not. I say not really. See, there is still a lack of understanding and, more specifically, lack of interest outside of crises in understanding about the true evolution of a psychopath. Mental health is undervalued and under-supported in this country. And then someone slips through the cracks. And then people wonder why.

I was trying to explain to someone how an onset of major mental illness like schizophrenia has a genetic component to it and that even though someone may have a genetic predisposition to the illness, they still need to have triggered the right psych-social stressors in their life in order to descend into the kind of psychosis like Cho did. It's a difficult concept because there's just really nothing comparable. I usually end up telling the story about the Princess and the Pea and highlight how no matter how many extra mattresses she piled on for comfort...that



haughty bitch would never sit just right and each layer she added to try and feel better was really one more barrier between her and the true root of the problem.



*Blank stares.* Yeah I get it. Just kill him already.

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