

John Rhead **Brief Solution-focused Treatment**

I saw him only a few times—ten at most. But we hit it off rather well. I was young, just out of graduate school and still in my twenties. He was young, and a graduate of a string of psychotic episodes. Somehow he had discovered that taking Ritalin relieved him of his persistent delusions/certainty that beings from other planets were focusing sophisticated electronic gear on his brain and reading his mind. He came to me because he had heard I was a doctor who was doing research with drugs, and FDA restrictions were making it hard for him to get a prescription for Ritalin for anything other than ADD. What he had heard about me was technically true, although I was the Ph.D. type of doctor (well before non-MDs prescribed) and the research I was doing had to do with psychedelics, not anti-psychotics or psycho-stimulants. In spite of the misunderstanding that brought us together, we continued to meet for a while to talk about his life and his experiences. I found his suffering to be compelling, and he apparently found something in me worth some ongoing conversation. Then came the day when he decided there was no point in talking anymore if I could not get him Ritalin, and we said goodbye.

I think I learned of his death when I saw the obituary in the newspaper. It was a few months after I last saw him. I wondered if I should go to his funeral, hoping it might give me the opportunity for some kind of closure or resolution to this apparent clinical failure. He had lived with his mother and I feared that at the funeral she might figure out who I was and chastise me for having failed to save her son. In spite of my worries I decided to go, and was relieved that there was a large enough crowd to allow me to slip in at the back of the chapel and remain anonymous. It was helpful to me to be there and to learn that there were those who loved him through his tormented and truncated life. After the service I was ready to slip out quietly when his mother approached me and said, "You must be Dr. Rhead." This was the moment I had dreaded—when she would angrily accuse me of having failed to save her son's life. I had learned somewhere along the way that he had taken his own life in a most creative way. Knowing he was suicidal, the family had kept a close eye on him and had—in particular—kept him away from firearms. However, his ingenuity had defeated their efforts. He found a single bullet, locked it in a vise in the basement workshop, placed his head in front of it, and hit the other end with a hammer to fire the round through his brain. I was impressed with—and horrified by—his creativity, and feared that his mother was about to lambaste me for having failed to save her son. As she addressed me, I cringed. I was not ready for the expression of gratitude that followed. She thanked me for having tried to help her son, and told me how much he had valued our time together. I was relieved, confused, and humbled.

I have often imagined that he stopped seeing me because of some way I had let him down—something beyond my inability to write him a prescription for Ritalin. I like to imagine that if he came to me today things would go differently. I also hope that he and I had shared a certain connection that was valuable to each of us in spite of the way things turned out.