

## **The Betrayal of Ray Sandford: Electroshock, Torture, and the Lutheran Church**

by Don Weitz

Note: This opinion piece is partly based on a letter I sent a few months ago to the Minnesota branch of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Minneapolis,

It's a miracle that 54-year-old Ray Sandford is still alive after having been forcibly electroshocked over 40 times in less than 6 months. He may not survive another electroshock ("ECT") procedure. In 2008, Ray was court-ordered to undergo an indefinite number of electroshocks, with the approval of Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, the state psychiatric organization and the Lutheran Church, specifically Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. On December 24, Mr. Sandford was forcibly subjected to his 36<sup>th</sup> shock. Some Christmas gift! By April 2009, Ray has undergone over 40 electroshocks against his will. By any standard of medical ethics, this is cruel and unusual treatment or torture, a blatant and continuing violation of human rights.

Electroshock – shock promoters sanitize and call this horrific psychiatric procedure “electroconvulsive therapy”-- is inherently destructive and inhumane. During every ‘treatment’, an average of 200 volts is delivered to the brain through attached electrodes. The immediate effects are a grand mal epileptic seizure, convulsion, and coma. When the patient awakens, s/he experiences a severe headache, disorientation (not knowing where you are, the date and/or your own name), physical or muscle weakness, trauma, and memory loss, which is frequently permanent. Permanent memory loss always indicates brain damage. Many shock survivors and professional critics assert the brain damage including memory loss always occurs following every ‘treatment’. According to neurologists, the so-called “improvement” following a series of ‘ECTs’ is actually temporary euphoria or giddiness that regularly occurs after head injury, the so-called “improvement” or “high” from electroshock lasts a maximum of 6-8 weeks. The average number of ECTs administered to the person is 8-10. Mr. Sandford has already been forcibly shocked over four times that number - one shock is one too many!

For several months since last spring, Ray Sandford has tried to refuse electroshock- he told his psychiatrist, a judge, and a spokesperson for the Lutheran Church that he suffering serious effects of the shocks and wants them stopped immediately. To their shame, not one of these authorities listened, they've callously ignored Mr. Sandford's competent refusal.

The Lutheran Church of America's refusal to get involved in Ray's case is particularly troubling and inexcusable – a betrayal of trust. The Church cannot plead ignorance about electroshock since its many devastating and permanent effects have been widely published in medical journals and the media for over 50 years. The Church also cannot justify its silence when it claims that making a

public statement would violate Mr. Sandford's right to confidentiality or privacy. In fact, Mr. Sandford has explicitly and repeatedly urged survivor and human organizations, such as MindFreedom International, to publicize his struggle to stop the electroshocks. Having survived over 40 ECTs, it's amazing that Mr. Sandford is still alive. That fact speaks to Mr. Sandford's courageous refusal of electroshock and his will to live—a sharp contrast to the Lutheran Church's continuing and inexcusable silence and its implicit support of this memory-destroying, brain-damaging procedure.

For over 25 years, many of us shock survivors, other psychiatric survivors, professional critics including psychiatrist Peter Breggin, neurologist John Friedberg, and neuroscientist Peter Sterling, and human right activists have protested against electroshock in various states including California and Texas; anti-shock protests and public demonstrations have also been held in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal in Canada, as well as Cork, Ireland and New Zealand. We're demanding an immediate ban. Through the organizational initiatives of MindFreedom International, a coalition of over 100 psychiatric survivor and human rights organizations in 14 countries, MindFreedom Ireland, and the Toronto-based Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA), we have launched national and international campaigns to ban electroshock because we know it's traumatic, frequently torturous, and unethical. Over 2 months ago on February 1, the CAPA Executive including myself wrote a letter of protest to Erick Jonsgaard, Ray's 'general guardian' - he never replied.

Given that the Lutheran Church is a religious and Christian organization, I find it bitterly ironic that on December 24, the day before Christmas when Mr. Sandford was forcibly shocked the 36th time, the Church refused to speak out, refused to raise any ethical or moral issues involved in electroshock, and refused to provide any meaningful support to Ray Sandford in his hours of great personal suffering and crisis. Equally unfortunate, his lawyer appears to be more of a hindrance than help. On April 15, 2009, USA Tax Day, Ray Sandford will be forcibly shocked again - in the name of "mental health". Perhaps Minnesota taxpayers will be shocked to know a portion of their taxes are being used to forcibly shock and brain-damage Ray Sandford and other vulnerable citizens.

*Biographical note:* Don Weitz is an insulin shock survivor, executive member of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault, and co-editor of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada*.

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