

The man who stopped the rain

The author recounts an extraordinary experience that occurred while treating a kindly older gentleman who believed he was God.

Conrad Moralis, MD

It was sometime in the mid-1970s and I was in psychiatric practice in a hospital in the lower mainland of British Columbia. Making my rounds one morning in the psychiatric ward, I was informed by the head nurse that a patient was admitted to the unit the night before under a mental health certificate, and I was asked specifically by the admitting emergency room physician to see him.

The admission note read as follows: “65-year-old man was brought to the emergency room by the police at 0325 hrs. He had been noticed by two police officers in a squad car, wandering aimlessly on East Hastings Street in Vancouver, at times approaching sleeping homeless people, leaving a cup by their side and walking away. When the police approached him, he stretched his arms out like a cross. He appeared to have a book in one hand which later was found to be a Bible. When asked for his name, he responded by saying that he was God, God Almighty. He then began swirling around with outstretched arms, looking at the homeless sleeping in doorways of ramshackle buildings, the street strewn with refuse and garbage and began to weep. ‘Is this what I have done? I am so sorry for what I have done.’ Checking the cups he had left by the homeless, the police found they contained some change; a dollar or two. At the

emergency room the patient assumed a prayerful position and was inaccessible to interview. He was unkempt, with long, matted hair and long beard, somewhat emaciated. He was dressed in a long robe made of coarse cotton, and wore sandals. He was calm and composed as if in a trance. He offered no resistance when he was searched for identity documents. The patient had nothing in his pockets apart from some change. No collateral information is available at this time. We have no idea of his true identity. He is not in need of any medications at this time, but an order has been left for Haldol IM, as a PRN if needed.”

I entered the patient’s room. Seeing his profile looking out the window at a violent rainstorm, I saw before me a tall, slender, handsome man dressed in hospital pajamas, with long silvery hair and beard, clean, and neatly combed after a shower. He was in deep thought, motionless as if in meditation. I stood there silently for a minute or two and then announced my name. He turned around slowly, with face solemn and serious, and he offered me a seat.

As I sat down, he took a seat across from me.

“My name’s Dr Moralis, Conrad Moralis,” I repeated. “I’m here to see you and talk to you to find out what has brought you here.”

He took a long time to answer, staring at me, looking deep inside my soul with his blue-gray eyes and deep,

penetrating glance. Then he said: “I am God and you are my creation.”

I was startled and had to spend some time in reflection. Finally I said, “What makes you think so?”

“Just look around you and you’ll see what I have done,” he said. “I have created the Earth, the Heavens, all the stars and the universe. I am the Creator, the power, and the glory, forever and ever, amen.”

He was calm, without any trace of anxiety, distress, or emotional discomfort. In fact he was in a euphoric, happy mood. I ran a quick differential diagnosis in my mind. I asked myself, Is this man psychotic? If so, is his psychosis drug-induced or has it an organic basis? Is he manic? Is he in a dissociative state? Is he an imposter? But I saw the man sitting before me to be calm, at peace with himself and the world around him, with a comforting, assured, confident presence and with no traces of agitation, anxiety, or mental distress.

I was lost for words. “I believe in God but I’ve never met Him before,” I finally said. “It is absolutely incredible to be in the presence of the Creator of all things. It is not something one does everyday. Why should I believe you?” I said.

He did not answer me directly. He closed his eyes and held his hands

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Dr Moralis is the pseudonym of a psychiatrist practising in British Columbia.

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together in prayer for some time and finally said softly, "It is a question of faith. Whoever believeth in me shall enter the kingdom of Heaven." He raised his right arm with two fingers extended. "You have a good heart my son; I know, and I bless you as all your sins are forgiven. Now go in peace and let me be." He then got up, turned around, his hands clasped together behind his back looking out through the window, which was being pelted by a violent rainstorm, at the North Shore hills beyond.

There was a long silence. "Excuse me," I finally said, "what would you like me to call you?"

He hesitated for a few moments, turned around, looked at me in a detached way for some time, and then said, "I want you to call someone on my behalf if you don't mind. She must be awfully worried about me by now."

"Who do you want me to call?"

"Call this number," he said, giving me the number, "and ask for Mary. Tell her to come to see me this afternoon. I want to see her."

"Are you related? Or just friends?"

"She is my wife."

"Please, if you don't mind, give me a name. What should I call you?"

"You may call me Thomas."

"Do you have a last name?"

"Christian, my earthly name is Thomas Christian." He turned around facing the rain, the distant hills.

"If you don't mind, please sit down, I have a few more questions to ask," I said. Thomas remained motionless, looking out the window.

"Mr Christian," I said in a serious tone. "I am not here on a social visit. You are in a most serious predicament. I am a psychiatrist

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and it is my duty to find out if you are mentally ill and if you are a danger to yourself or to others and I need your cooperation to help me find the answers; I assure you sir, your future depends on it.”

Thomas stood by the window with his back to me. “Have it your way, Mr Christian,” I said. “You’re going to stay here as long as it takes for us to make a decision about your mental state.”

As I was about to leave, he turned around and said softly, “Just call Mary for me. I would be much obliged.”

I called the number Thomas had given me that morning as soon as I could and made an appointment to see Mary that afternoon after her visit with her husband.

I was not really surprised when I saw her. She was about sixty, of medium height, slender, with gray hair pulled back in a bun, with no make-

up. A dignified woman dressed in a simple cotton dress and a cardigan.

“It is so nice to meet you,” I said. “We’ve talked on the phone. My name is Dr Conrad Moralis and I’m looking after your husband.” That’s all I said and I waited for a response. But none was forthcoming.

I finally had to break the deafening silence. “You saw your husband this afternoon. How did you find him?”

She spoke in a voice steeped in pain and turmoil. “He is very unhappy to be kept in hospital against his will, dressed in undignified, loose-fitting hospital pajamas. As for what he was doing on Hastings Street last night, helping the poor and dispossessed, he has done it all his life. The man I saw today is the same man I have been married to in eternity. Thomas is not mentally ill and I want to take him home with me.”

“Let me explain something to you Mrs Christian,” I said in a most seri-

ous, solemn voice. “You are not fully aware of the gravity of the situation your husband finds himself in. He was brought into the hospital by the police and was subsequently certified under the Mental Health Act of British Columbia as to be suffering from a mental illness.” I paused for a few seconds to allow what I had just said to sink in. “I am a specialist in psychiatry and it is my job to find out if your husband is indeed mentally ill and if he is so, if he is a danger to himself or others. I desperately need your cooperation, as your husband is not either willing or mentally able to answer my questions.” I paused briefly to collect my thoughts and then went on. “I want you to tell me who he really is.”

“I want you to tell *me* what you think is wrong with my husband.”

“Let me be direct with you. Your husband believes that he is God. I believe he is suffering from a delusional disorder, grandiose type. He is actually feeling euphoric, without

any insight, inner turmoil, or anxiety, totally wrapped up in his delusion.”

She paused briefly. “His earthly name is Thomas Christian.”

“The number I called to reach you is the number of a motel on East Hastings. What is your home address?”

“We are in transit; we have no fixed address. We were going to stay in Vancouver and be gone in a month.”

“Where to may I ask?”

“We haven’t decided yet. We spend our summers in British Columbia and in the winter you will find us in the southern US, mostly in Arizona.”

“Does your husband have an occupation? Does he work? How does he support you and himself?”

“We are not rich, but we are sufficiently well provided for and independently self-supporting. We share what we have with those less fortunate than we are. Any time I say to Thomas that I need something that we cannot afford, he always reminds me by saying, “Remember, Christ was poor.”

“What does he do with his time?”

“Oh. When in Vancouver, he is on Hastings Street every day, sometimes helping in the kitchens of the shelters, mostly walking around, talking to the homeless, the lost, mentally ill, the so-called drug addicts, those dispossessed and abandoned by their families, and he ministers to them all, as God would do, as Christ would have done, as our son did.”

“What do you think of Thomas’s claim that he is God.”

“He is and has always been who he claims to be. I fervently believe in him. He is my God, my Lord; everlasting, forever omnipotent, loving, and forgiving.”

I needed time to reflect and absorb this metaphysical discourse. So, we sat in silence for a couple of minutes and I finally said,

“How are you getting along? Is he treating you well?”

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She smiled an angelic, warm smile. “Oh, yes,” she said, “He is the most wonderful, kind, loving, generous, selfless man you could ever know. I am absolutely in love with him and will stay with him until he takes us home to be with Yesuda.”

“Yesuda? That’s the Hebrew name for Jesus,” I said incredulously.

“Yes. That is our son’s name.”

“Why did you name your son Yesuda?”

“When our son was born in Vancouver in 1935, my husband wanted to call him Jesus, but the Vital Statistics people told us that Jesus was not a proper name for a child and they refused to register it as such. And so we called him Yesuda.”

“And with your last name of Christian, you would get as close to Christ as you could,” I interjected. “But what has happened to Yesuda? He must be about 40 now. Where is he and what is he doing?”

Mary was silent for a while. Remembering some painful events, she began to weep silently for a few seconds before regaining her composure and wiping the tears with her fingertips.

“Our son lived with us for years, helping the poor and the sick in heart as well as body, the homeless and the forgotten and abandoned. He was a fine person; loving, kind, and generous. One day, he was 33 at the time, he kissed us on the cheeks, said goodbye, left home, and disappeared forever. I don’t know what happened to him, but I feel deeply that he is no longer alive. Thomas told me that he was convinced that our son was Jesus Christ and that it was no coincidence that we had lost him at age 33, when Christ was crucified.”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath to collect her thoughts. We sat in silence for a while and then I said, “Has Thomas ever been in trouble with the law?”

“No, never.”

“Has he ever been under psychiatric care?”

“Never.”

“Has he ever had any medical problems, illnesses, surgeries?”

“He has never been ill a day in his life.”

“He’s been offered medication for his illness, but he has refused taking it,” I said.

“I’m not surprised. He does not drink, smoke cigarettes, and has never taken any drugs.”

I had wanted to do a complete mental status examination, but Thomas was not interested in talking to me. Checking the nurse’s notes 4 days after his admission, I saw that he was eating and sleeping well. It was noted that he was always alert, oriented to time, date, place, and person. He was always polite and thankful for what was done for him. He was described as a gentle, soft-spoken man who kept to himself and was not interested in interacting with other patients. He had shown no evidence of depression, thought disorder, or hallucinatory experiences. His mood was described as being normal. Apart from his fixed grandiose type delusion, he had not shown any other signs of psychosis or detachment from reality. To restore his sense of dignity, I allowed him to have his own clothes on the ward, washed and clean, and his sandals.

It was raining hard that morning and had been raining for a few days, the sky dark and gray, and as bleak as it could be, with the weather forecast advising us to expect more of the same for another five days. It was mid-morning and I was sitting at a table in the small dining room of the ward, interviewing a patient. Thomas was sitting in a chair a few feet away from me with his back against the large window with his eyes closed. I was distracted by the incessant, hypnotic, monotonous sound of pellets of water hitting against the large panes of win-

dow glass when I heard the mocking, angry voice of a male patient addressing Thomas.

“Hey you, Tommy boy. You’re God you say.” Laughing derisively he went on, “I am fed up with this damned rain. Go ahead and stop it if you’re God.”

Thomas did not respond. He sat motionless, with his hands resting on the armchair, and his eyes closed, apparently in deep meditation.

The rain suddenly stopped a few minutes later. The wind blew hard and the sun shone through the parting clouds. The rays of sun poured through the windows, giving the poorly furnished room a heavenly atmosphere. There was pandemonium as about 20 patients and staff gathered before the windows, marveling at what had just happened. As a psychiatrist, always being watchful for non-verbal communication and body language, I watched Thomas intently, but did not notice any change in his demeanor. All the while he kept his vigil, seated with his eyes closed, hands resting on the armchair, seemingly oblivious to the miracle. But I thought how mightily pleased and proud he felt with himself for a job so well done, if he was indeed God in human form.

I think of the man I met some 30 years ago and see him standing by the window, a graceful, dignified, emaciated man with flowing long silvery hair and beard, dressed in the simple, loose-fitting hospital pajamas, looking deep inside my soul, offering me absolution and blessing, asking me to go in peace. Beyond his fixed delusion of being God, he had no other discernible psychiatric illness. He was a man living in a world of make believe, totally free from inner conflicts, emotional turmoil, or anxiety. Thomas’s delusion was uplifting, ego-syntonic, totally accepted by him, and shared by his wife Mary, without any doubt or questions.

I discharged Thomas from the hospital after two weeks as we had no reason to keep him there. He had an untreatable illness, which caused him no emotional distress. He was not a threat to anyone or a danger to himself. He had no insight into his illness and denied being mentally or emotionally ill. As he left the hospital with Mary, he thanked me for having treated him with dignity and respect. Before getting into his cab, Thomas turned, raised his right arm with two fingers extended, and blessed me. His face lighted up with a big grin, the first and only smile he had for me since we first met.

Christ was poor, as Thomas always reminded Mary. If Christ walked among us today, without any material possessions, maybe only a backpack, ministering to the forgotten and abandoned souls sleeping in doorways,

sharing his meagre food and what he has with those in need, would we recognize him?

Thomas’s diagnosis on discharge was delusional disorder, grandiose type, untreatable. No follow-up is necessary.

As for Mary, it was a case of *folie-a-deux*; in other words, a person accepting another one’s delusion as reality and fact.

I never saw Thomas after he left the hospital. I wouldn’t be surprised if when I die and enter the pearly gates, as I hope I will do some day, to see Thomas Christian at the gate, welcoming me to his world of everlasting light, love, hope, and peace. Embracing me in his arms for the first time, he will say, “It’s so good to see you again old buddy. After all these years and after such a long journey, welcome home.” **BGM**