

My name is Sarah Page, and I'm a resident of Salem, Oregon, and I'm asking for your support for SB 763.

I turn 30 this Saturday, March 16, 2019. And up until I finally reached out to my estranged father May 2018, the only things I knew about him, all I had ever heard about him, was that he was in jail because he loved meth more than he loved my brother and I. So the day that finally reached out to him, my words were sharp, intent to plunge into his heart like guilt and shame. It was my belief, that he never experienced these things. "Why?" I pierced. "Was it worth it?" And I twisted. And I waited, angrily, bitterly. But not really knowing, or thinking, or caring about how he might respond to my knives.

And I wasn't prepared for it.

He began crying. He was so happy, he said. Happy, and totally ready for the knives. Which suddenly fell to the ground, letter by letter. The bond was instantaneous. And powerful. There was warmth and kindness. But there was something very off. He spoke very erratically, his thoughts were very disordered. Words, repetitive and frantic. But there so was much undeniable love in his voice. And for awhile, I wept with him.

Over the next several months I've come to learn an entirely new perspective to this hole in my heart. Us being taken away from him tore his life apart, he said. And was told to stay away from us. My mom confirmed, and told me that he was prone to weird behavior and that's why we left, for our safety. This was long before the meth. "Weird behavior? Like what?" I asked her. "One day," she replied, "I came home from grocery shopping with you and TJ. You're less than 1 and you're in my arms. When we opened the door we found all the blinds were down. He had kicked the couch over and was behind it pointing a crossbow at the door. At all of us. So we made a plan, and everyone agreed. So we moved 2,000 miles apart."

My dad didn't understand why my mom took us away then, and still doesn't understand it to this day. Many people who live with schizophrenia suffer a co-current neurological disorder known as **anosognosia** - the deficit of self-awareness. He lacked the insight to comprehend what was wrong with his actions.

What my mother and both our families were viewing of my father was the prodromal period, which is gradual, and present with odd behaviors and eccentricities, and precedes the first full onset or "breaking" episode. That first "break" is their first psychotic episode and it's new to them and everyone around them. It can be very scary and it can ruin lives. My father was abandoned by his family and turned to drugs to self-medicate. Was homeless and in and out of jail for almost 30 years for petty crimes. His life is traumatized, institutionalized and you can hear the cognitive delay when he speaks. I love him, and it's so obvious he loves me. Which is all I've wanted since I was small. It took me 30 years but I got my dad. He says some weird stuff and I enjoy our conversations. It's just very sad to me that he had to go through hell and back to learn that the core of his problems was schizophrenia.

While barely anyone knew about schizophrenia 30 years ago, it's 2019 today. We know better. We understand how we can prevent tragedies like this from happening. There are models and a lot of people willing to come to the table to figure out how we handle these situations civilly instead of involving the courts. But Oregon is failing.

<https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/ranking-states>

Mental Health America recently ranked the prevalence and accessibility of mental health care in the country — Oregon is ranked dead last (51) for the categories 'Adult' and 'Prevalence'. Oregon's overall state ranking is a miserable (49). How is this even possible? We know what works!

Let's focus on the the psychological and neurological aspects that are leading to issues rather than letting the justice system work it out. This preventative approach will save lives, maintain dignity and humanity, and far better results than locking people up. It can keep families together.