

IN SEARCH OF A HOME

Tony Taylor is a 39-year-old, separated, African American man who was admitted to a psychiatric day program in the shelter where he lived when he complained of sudden impulses to stab other residents. The staff in the shelter describe him variously as "manipulative" and "charming." He gives a long history of abuse of alcohol, heroin, and cocaine, but says he has been "clean" for 3 weeks. He reports several arrests for felonies, including armed robbery and kidnapping, for which he always seems to have an explanation that minimizes his own responsibility.

Mr. Taylor entered the city shelter system 2 years ago when the woman he was living with threw him out because she couldn't tolerate his temper and substance abuse. During his marriage to another woman 20 years ago, he was able to work briefly in blue-collar jobs in between prison and hospital stays. He has not worked for the past 7 years, and has never paid child support to his wife.

Life did not begin easily for Mr. Taylor. His father left home before he was born, leaving behind a family scandal. The family story is that his father impregnated his wife's sister, causing Tony to be treated like an outcast by the family. His mother had nine children, each with a different

father. She had chronic depression and had received extensive psychiatric treatment. All of her children have psychiatric or substance abuse problems.

When Mr. Taylor was 3, his mother turned him over to a succession of reluctant caretakers on both sides of the family. He was physically abused by some of his mother's boyfriends, being whipped with belts and electrical cords. He dropped out of school in seventh grade because "a teacher embarrassed me." He began drinking when he entered the Job Corps at age 16. In his late teens and early 20s, he used nasal cocaine and heroin, then intravenous heroin for about a year. He stopped using drugs in his mid-20s, but continued to binge on alcohol every few weeks.

At age 19, after an argument with his wife, he cut his wrists, and was hospitalized for 6 months. He was given an antidepressant, an unknown tranquilizer, and psychotherapy following his discharge, but stopped treatment when he felt better. Over the ensuing 20 years there have been multiple hospitalizations when he was suicidal or had violent impulses. At one point he jumped off a bridge, sustaining multiple fractures. He has never exhibited manic symptoms, nor has he ever had delusions or hallucinations.

The one psychiatric chart that is available outlines an extensive criminal record and gives the patient the diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder. His criminal history includes charges for multiple armed robberies, desertion and neglect of a minor, and kidnapping of a 20-year-old man. With reference to this last crime, he says that he held the man at bay with a machete while friends stole the man's car.