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'Sheila' finally wins court battle

United Press International
SEATTLE — The case — and story — of Sheila is today among the best known of those involving civil commitment to psychiatric institutions.

Her freedom to live a life which others find unacceptable was, until recently, threatened. But she has finally won her court battle to work it out for herself.

Controversy over the law has died down in the two years since newspaper articles reported Sheila living in her car and eating castoff food. But the 34-year-old former accountant won an unprecedented court battle which challenged the right of an individual to refuse psychiatric treatment.

The decision in her favor came after her widowed mother, Dora, had her declared incompetent and

herself named as Sheila's guardian. As guardian, she persuaded King County Superior Court Judge Frank Roberts to commit her only child "voluntarily" to a private mental hospital for 30 days to determine whether Sheila's "choice of lifestyle is made freely, knowingly and intelligently or whether it is the product of some degree of mental incapacity."

"I don't agree with my guardian," Sheila said in an interview. "It's a family problem."

Judge Roberts' order was appealed by Sheila's court-appointed attorneys, who argued that it is a direct violation of the intent of the four-year-old involuntary treatment act. The state court of appeals agreed.

King County courts have twice previously found Sheila not com-mittable under the definition of the Civil Commitment Law. It allows the state to commit for psychiatric treatment only those persons considered dangerous to themselves or others, or so mentally disabled that they fail to provide for their essential human needs and as a result are in danger of serious physical harm.

Sheila is living now at a charity-run hotel for women which she can afford now that her mother applied for Supplemental Security Income for her.

Sheila became a public figure after she was evicted from her apartment more than two years ago. She and her mother do not get along. She moved with her belong-

ings into her old car, which she parked on her neighborhood street, several doors down from her mother's house.

Without funds she salvaged un-saleable food from grocery store garbage bins. She used the toilet facilities of a nearby service station or a friend's house. She wore several layers of warm, protective clothing on warm days. She did other things which seemed strange to others.

For much of the past two years, after her car was towed away, Sheila lived in the open, sleeping on the ground, in a packing crate, in a tent in a neighbor's yard, eating castoff food, and sitting on park benches having "chit-chats" with people.

This way of life was disturbing to the mother, who argued that before Sheila changed she was "absolutely a model citizen and a good girl, quick, neat and sharp mentally."

"Whoever thought of my daughter ever ending up eating garbage down in the middle of the city," she was quoted as saying in her attorney's brief.

Dora's unsuccessful efforts to have Sheila committed to a mental institution throughout 1975 were detailed in a series of newspaper articles which described Sheila's "unsanitary lifestyle" and "bizarre behavior." Her name was changed to "Sarah" in the articles "for her own protection." She prefers to be called by her own name.

In addition to the argument that Sheila's lifestyle was indecent,

pathetic, and unhealthy and that she was disturbed and different from what she used to be, the mother's attorney argued Sheila was unhappy with her way of life, that she believed it to be a matter of survival and necessity, without alternatives.

She is a small woman and, like her mother, attractive and charming. She smiles often and warmly. Her manner is even and gracious. She is direct, attentive and healthy-looking.

The clothes she wore during two interviews in the lobby of her residence-hotel were still heavy and protective but coordinated — a new, purple winter coat, matching purple pants, purple shirt and warm

purple knitted cap. She lipsticked.

"Hospitals can't do anything for you," said Sheila, who has had several.

"It's the doldrums, sitting and reading magazines for years. The mental stimulus isn't there. And being idle, I don't eat three meals a day. I don't eat fatty meals in an institution, good now."

"Psychiatrists give you pills, don't need and you have a reaction. It causes more problems than really there at the outset."

"One has to work it out for oneself — keep your immune system away from them."

Poisonous lunches get good response

United Press International
CHICAGO — Richard Hall always gets a great response when he serves a poisonous lunch.

That's because all the toxins on the table are hidden in the so-called natural foods and missing from the processed items.

For Hall, vice-president for science and technology at McCormick & Co., it's a lesson on perspective.

"The idea came up several years ago," he said of his luncheon "People at various times have said, 'What if we tested all foods the way we test some things?' This is just a logical extension of that naive question."

His luncheons include a slide show and speech, in which he tests the high levels of arsenic in the shrimp, carcinogens in the ham, and other dangers in the diet.

One by one, Hall shows that potentially harmful toxins exist in every item served at the luncheon and warns that too much of anything can be harmful.

Almost none of the foods, he tells his guests, would pass government safety requirements if introduced as additives. The bread, processed item, is the only item other than hearts of palm that passes inspection on Hall's menu.

"A lot of people and, to a certain extent, our government, tend to pay an inordinate amount of attention to the wrong things," he said in a recent speech. "There are risks associated with food, as there are with everything else in our lives."

Hall said people pay the most attention to the smallest dangers in the biggest food related threat to health comes from microbes. Not in order, he said, are nutritional deficiencies, environmental contaminants, natural toxicants such as poisonous mushrooms, pesticide residue and food additives.

People worry about additives which can only be dangerous in extremely concentrated form, Hall said, but think nothing of the dangers in eating a cream puff that has been sitting on a diner counter for three hours.

When people grew and prepared their own food, Hall said, they had the confidence that grows from innocence. In fact, food is much cleaner, safer and proportionately cheaper than before. But we've lost longer have the confidence."

After botulism was found in a batch of canned food, he said, consumers began canning their own food. But the dangers of that practice are estimated to be several thousand times as great as when food is processed commercially.

"The most toxic things we know," he said, "are all natural." Even water can be dangerous, he said. If a person drinks enough of it, natural body enzymes are diluted to the point of causing dysfunction.

During his demonstrations, Hall assures his audience that a poisonous lunch won't be fatal — all the foods are "nutritious and safe, in balanced amounts."

Hall doesn't call for the end to government regulation or discontinue safety testing as superfluous, but calls for a more reasoned approach in studying and weighing the relative dangers in different foods and additives.

Although most foods contain some dangerous ingredients, Hall said sanitation, variety and moderation in diet reduce risks substantially.

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<p>THURSDAY EVENING SPECIAL Italian Candle Light Spaghetti Dinner SERVED WITH SPICED MEAT BALLS AND SAUCE Parmesan Cheese - Tossed Green Salad Choice of Salad Dressing - Hot Garlic Bread Tea or Coffee</p>		
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