

The Never-Ending Case
By Benjamin Brown

Sometimes at Legal Aid, there's not a clean ending to a case. Sometimes, a case will just keep coming back up, year after year. It's our job to help the client, because otherwise they would lose by attrition. That's how it was for Mrs. Geraldine Wedgewood. I had represented Mrs. Wedgewood the year before, in a custody case against her ex-husband. She was constantly plagued by him because he was violent and mentally unstable. His name was Daniel Corprue, and his mental problems stemmed from religious-based delusions. From what my client told me, Daniel heard voices of Demons telling him to do things. This seemed like a classic case of undiagnosed schizophrenia, but one thing was certain, Daniel was dangerous. Mrs. Wedgewood had been awarded a protective order against him two years before, after one particularly bad instance of domestic violence.

Daniel had recently filed to modify custody, and he was self-represented. His only argument seemed to be the allegation that Geraldine had lied about him, in order to get the protective order. On the day of the Hearing Officer Conference, I sat down with my client at the table, and I saw Daniel walk in the door. I could tell right away that he was just "off" somehow. He argued with the Hearing Officer and me for half an hour, and most of that time he was standing up and pacing around the room like a caged rabid animal. He just kept saying that he wanted to challenge the protective order. The Hearing Officer and I explained to him that there was nothing to challenge because the protective order had expired more than a year earlier, and his time to challenge it had passed. It was like he couldn't grasp that idea though, and that just made him angrier.

From what the Hearing Officer said, Daniel had been to three prior Hearing Officer Conferences trying to argue the same thing. Each time, the Hearing Officer explained to him that he could not get visitation with the children until he completed a batterer's intervention program. But each time he returned to court he had not completed the program. This conference was the same. Daniel admitted that he had not even attempted to attend the batterer's intervention program, and the Hearing Officer immediately issued a recommendation denying his visitation.

That's when the situation escalated, however. Daniel got angrier and angrier and wouldn't accept the recommendation. He refused to leave the office, and the Hearing Officer had to call security to have him removed. For safety's sake, I escorted my client out, and I heard one of the bailiffs saying that Daniel was in the clerk's office filing another objection. So yet again, I don't think this is the last I've seen of Daniel Corprue. He didn't really seem like the type to just let the matter drop. But at least for now, Mrs. Wedgewood and her children are safe.

Please note that names have been changed to protect the identity of clients.