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October 26/97

Gillian and David Helfgott
c/o Penguin Books Australia Ltd.,
Ringwood, Victoria,
Australia.

Dear Gillian and David,

I'm writing you from Victoria, BC Canada. I'm sure you're swamped with mail from admirers like me but I hope you'll have a chance to notice this one.

There's enclosed some info about a movie showing project I've been running for 4 1/2 years now in a lecture auditorium in a psych hospital - the hospital in my neighbourhood where I have been a patient for the depressive side of M/D illness twice in the last 8 years. I lost a sister to mental illness through suicide - losing a mother to depression and now dementia. It's an interesting tale as all of our stories are. It's still a struggle but I found new abilities in making this film project work.

Part of what I do is show movies on mental illness/health topics and I often include opportunities for discussion. Of course I heard about SHINE (through a festival in Toronto) long before I saw it and was not disappointed when I saw it in the theatre when it arrived in Victoria. The emotional impact on the audience was overwhelming.

I was involved in a special showing and facilitated a discussion on near by Salt Spring Island, presenting additional material gleaned with my son's help, from the internet. Almost the whole packed house stayed to participate after the show - an excellent learning atmosphere. Movies - especially yours, really open people up.

My venue uses video source material so when it was released I scheduled it in my theatre as you see in my playbill. A full house and again an enthusiastic discussion including some answers to peoples' inevitable questions about time lines and motivations. Love You To Bits and Pieces was a great resource for that.

Gillian, I found your book by chance, loved it. It's an even better story than the movie. So happy to see that the emotional thrust of the movie is genuinely true to the actual story. I went to great lengths to get yours and Penguin's permission to reproduce the couple of pages on the back of my program (a bit of a stretch to say you gave your own permission. At the time I understood you would be personally approving through Fran Lebowitz, hope that's OK.)

Yours, David, is a hopeful story that is so inspiring to many of us who've been through the trials and hopelessness of mental illness. Your story is such a boon to people like me who are working at recovery. In our community are many to whom you both are heroes.

A friend (fellow manic-depressive, still having to be hospitalized from time to time) who instigated a buddy recreation and visiting program for people in psychiatric residential homes has loaned me a CD of SHINE's music and she's ordered your Rach 3 recording. You're a symbol, an inspiration.

Another friend and I gave a workshop a IAPSRs (psycho-social rehab) conference in Vancouver, Canada about being public "Being Out About It" about one's mental illness. Yours is now, of course, one of the most recognizable of the many examples of people locally and on the world stage who we cited as examples. There was a brief video clip of you amongst our other heroes.

Yours is one of a body of stories about people who are telling their stories and changing the climate for people with mental illness. You're right up there carrying the flag. The movie was a huge step in the idea of people with mental illness being accepted in our society. Popular media makes a massive impression. Bully for Scott.

It's a gamble sticking your neck so far out but you see the rewards for all of us are great too! Thanks for this gift.

Hope all is well for you both.

It would mean a great deal to me and my audiences if you have a chance to acknowledge this letter.

Of course I'd love to meet you if you ever visit our West Coast!

Best Regards,

Bruce Saunders

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