

Interview with Vince Li

May 19, 2012, Winnipeg

On May 19, 2012 I Chris Summerville, CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada held my regular meeting with Vince Li, the person living with schizophrenia who beheaded Tim McLean. I have been visiting Li on an average of once every two months since his remand to Selkirk Mental Health Centre 4 four years ago.

I have decided that Mr. Li's story needs to be told, to add a human touch to a horrible tragedy. What we have here are two victims and two families who are victims of untreated, uncontrolled psychosis.

Before I do any interview regarding the Greyhound Bus tragedy I always ask myself, "What if it had been my 25 year old daughter." My sympathy to Ms. de Delley and her family are real. And yet, I also ask, "What if it had been my son who had killed Tim McLean in such a ghastly and grotesque fashion." I hope that such self- questioning softens my response to the many questions I have been asked about my personal and professional knowledge of Mr. Li.

There are no easy answers to the many faceted questions that bombard both families and the media. However, I think the media has been more favourable to the McLean family, probably because public sentiment is on their side and we as a country have entered a period of "tough on crime" with little attention paid to restorative justice, rehabilitation, recovery and redemption, or the influence and role of mental illness in this particular most unfortunate incident.

What follows is the result of an edited interview that took place at Selkirk Mental Health Centre after Mr. Li and I had enjoyed a Chinese meal that I had brought to him. Mr. Li signed the following:

I, Vince Li, under no duress or coercion, do give unconditional permission for Chris Summerville to share my story and to use any information I have given him in an interview conducted May 19, 2012 at Selkirk Mental Health Centre. I understand that this interview or parts of it about me may be published in the printed press or used in radio and television media.

Mr. Li was soft spoken, using simple English as English is not his first language. His answers were rather direct and succinct, revealing a person who has given much contemplation to this tragedy and "his guilt."

The formal interview lasted about 45 minutes.

Tell me about your background?

I am a 44 years old and grew up in northeastern China in the province of Liaoning.

(Liaoning Province, often called 'the Golden Triangle' because of its superior geographical location, includes boundaries on the Yellow Sea, the Bohai Gulf, and the Yalu River, which makes Liaoning the closest gateway to the Korean Peninsula. As the southernmost province of the three provinces in northeast China, Liaoning Province's proximity to the sea has given it commercial and strategic advantages throughout its history.)

My mother and father are still living. I have an older brother who is a businessman and a younger sister who is a secretary. They know about the Greyhounds bus situation, but my mother and father do not.

My wife and I immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada in June, 2001. I had studied as a computer engineer for 4 years in China. But I could not find a job in Canada. I worked at McDonalds, Meatland Foods and at Grant Memorial Baptist Church.

Do you have a spirituality?

I believe in Jesus Christ. He is my Saviour. I try to follow God.

When did you begin to experience schizophrenia?

In 2004. I didn't know what it was. I now know what it is. I began to hear voices that normal people do not hear. I thought I heard the voice of God telling me to write down my journey. The voice told me that I was the third story of the Bible. That I was like the second coming of Jesus. I was to save people from a space alien attack. That is why I traveled around the country. I am not sure of all the places I went to. I now know that it was schizophrenia I was suffering from.

Why did you do what you did on the bus?

I bought a knife at Canadian Tire. I bought it for any emergency for the journey to protect myself from the aliens. I was really scared. I remember cutting off his head. I believed he was an alien. The voices told me to kill him. That he would kill me or others. I do not believe this now. It was totally wrong. It was my fault. I sinned. But it was the schizophrenia.

What else do you remember about the incident?

I try to forget it. I try to stay busy here. It is painful to think about.

How do you feel about what happened?

I feel nervous. I feel painful. I am embarrassed. It was wrong.

Do you understand why people are scared of you?

Yes. I don't think I will ever do it again. I didn't know at that time I had schizophrenia. Now I do.

What would you say to Ms. de Delly and Tim Mc Lean’s family?

I am really sorry for what I did. If I could talk to her directly I would do anything for their family. I would ask forgiveness, but I know it would be hard to accept.

How has the time been at Selkirk Mental Health Centre?

I know that I suffer from schizophrenia. The treatment team gives me a chance to recover, to be normal. I am glad to be taking the medication.

Do you think you are getting better?

Yes. My thinking is becoming normal. I don’t think weird things. I take my medication, Olanzapine, everyday. I am glad to take it. I don’t have any weird voices any more.

How do we know you will take your medication when you get out on your own?

I would be glad to be under a treatment order because medication helps me. It is very important. I don’t want to do what I did ever again.

How does it make you feel that most people do not think you should get a pass to walk around in Selkirk? Do you understand their fear?

I understand people are scared because of my behaviour on the Greyhound bus. I am not at risk for anybody. I don’t believe in aliens. I don’t hear voices. I would call my doctor if I heard voices again. Yes, I understand their fear.

Some say the RCMP should have killed you that night?

I should have been killed at that time. I still believe that. But I am thankful that the RCMP didn’t.

What is schizophrenia? What are you learning?

It is hearing voices or having delusions. You don’t know what is real. I need to take medication on time. I also have to have meaningful activity, something to do. I have to learn how to handle stress.

What helps you deal with stress?

Taking my medication. Exercising and doing Bible study with the chaplain here.

Do you have side-effects from the medication?

Yes. I sleep too much. I feel tired a lot and I have gained some weight.

Do you believe you should be under a treatment order?

I should be here. I should be under a treatment order.

If you ever got out of Selkirk Mental Health Centre, what would you do?

I hope to leave one day, but I have to make sure it wouldn't happen again. That there would be no voices. I would change my name to be anonymous. But I would still be in touch with my doctor.

What do you think of Tim's Law that any "mentally insane person who kills someone would never be released."

I don't think so, that that should happen. Mental illness is an illness. It is treatable. My schizophrenia is not the real me, but it is an illness.

How would you know you were getting sick again?

Hearing voices, stopping my medication, and starting to believe in aliens. God would not tell me to do something bad.

How do you feel about what you are reading in the newspapers?

I don't read the papers because I don't want to be reminded of what happened on the Greyhound bus because it was so bad and wrong.

Are you happy?

No.

Will you ever be happy?

No. I can never forget the Greyhound bus.

Any final words?

I would like to say to Tim McLean's mother I am sorry for killing your son. I am sorry for the pain I have caused. I wished I could reduce that pain.

As we ended the interview I could see the moisture in Mr. Li's eyes. It is remarkable the insight Mr. Li has. It is even more remarkable the positive effects of the medication. Up to 25 percent of people who will have a psychotic break with reality will never experience another psychotic episode. Up to 65 % will experience a degree of recovery in order to live a meaningful life. 10% will take their life by suicide due to the losses associated with schizophrenia. Of the 300,000 people in Canada who live with some form of schizophrenia, the vast majority lead quiet, law

abiding lives hoping for some quality of life. People living with schizophrenia are more likely to be victims of violence rather than being perpetrators of violence. Schizophrenia is treatable. Recovery is possible.