

Stand Your Ground

Category: Regrets/No Regrets

written by Jill Rovitzky Black | June 26, 2024

I was too damn polite. Blame my Midwestern upbringing that hardwired me with nice girl, don't be pushy settings.

I was too deferential, cautious about antagonizing the mental health professionals I needed as allies. I worried that I'd come across as presumptuous, as difficult if I suggested that I—without benefit of their training, clinical experience, or certifications—saw something they were missing.

I didn't quibble with their diagnosis of depression, but there had to be something else going on. Depression couldn't explain the strange and uncharacteristic turns in my husband.

I had fleshed out and backed up my gut feelings with evidence I uncovered while snuffling my way down myriad PubMed rabbit holes. I built a collection of papers that pointed toward frontotemporal dementia (FTD), an odd and easily missed neurologic disease. Specifically, I suspected he had the behavioral variant, in which judgment, priorities, adhering to the implicit and explicit rules of society warp and vanish, while cognition, at least initially, remains intact. FTD just seemed to fit, even to the documented phenomenon of life-long law-abiding citizens changing course and embarking on criminal activity. It certainly wasn't depression that landed my husband in the Federal courthouse where he was convicted of felony bank fraud charges.

So I respectfully, almost timidly, posed queries to the various clinicians who treated him and otherwise professionally crossed his path. I attached PDFs of relevant papers to my emails, carefully and full of phrases like "so many of the symptoms seem to align that...," "I can't help but suspect...," and finally, "Would a neurologic evaluation be advisable?"

Apparently not. I did not succeed in getting traction with my suggestions until it was too late. Only a brain autopsy confirmed my suspicions that it was in fact FTD that had hijacked my husband.

The phrase "stand your ground" has become horribly loaded now that it is attached to laws protecting the right to respond to perceived threats with deadly force. Similarly, "doing your own research" now suggests nothing more than a quick trawl through social media in search of bias confirmation.

But I did my own research, and I now regret that I didn't do a better job of standing my ground when putting my perceptions up against expert opinion. If I had been truer to myself and less concerned about offending professional sensitivities, I might have better protected my husband.

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