

SHATTERED

The Foul Body Odor
that Almost Killed Me

by

Carry Wilson

DEDICATION

I want to thank GOD! This book is dedicated to anyone who suffers from any rare disorder, as they are challenging to diagnose and treat. I dedicate this book to anyone suffering from Trimethylaminuria/TMAU or any other body odor condition. This book is also dedicated to my family, the great city of New Orleans, Louisiana, and all the victims and survivors of hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Finally, I dedicate this book to Dr. George Preti who served as an analytical organic chemist at the Monell Chemical Senses Center for over forty years. Dr. Preti and a team of chemists led the fight for the cause, effects, origins, and treatment of TMAU. Rest in peace, Dr. George Preti (Dr. Preti/Dr. Pratt, 1944–2020).

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THE BEGINNING

 1996, summer in Chicago. I was a twenty-year-old mother with a five-year-old daughter. We were at the beach with four of my best friends and their children. I stood in the sand, watching the children play and laugh. It was a beautiful, windy day. When a gust of wind blew by me, I smelled a musky scent coming off my body. I shouldn't have been musky because I bathed before we came to the beach.

Nevertheless, I put on more deodorant and joined my friends in the water. After about two hours of playing volleyball in the waist-deep water with my friends, one of them said, "It smells like fish out here." The other girls and I turned our noses up and looked around, but saw nothing.

Before we left the beach, I took another shower and put on some baby powder, deodorant, and clean clothes. We made it home at 8:00 p.m., and my daughter Sherry and I ate dinner, which my boyfriend had cooked. It was a humid night, so I opened the window and put Sherry to bed. Then I watched TV with my boyfriend, whom I had been in a relationship with for two years. As we sat on the bed watching TV, a cool breeze blew through the window, and again, I smelled the scent of musk coming off my body. I had taken a shower less than two hours before and had done nothing that would explain why I smelled overly musty. I thought to myself, *I need to switch my deodorant.*

The next day, Sherry and I met up with friends for a party at

my best friend Daisy's house. My girls and I were hanging out outside on the porch when three guys we knew walked up and joined us.

We were all joking, laughing, and having fun when one guy shouted, "One of you bitches needs to take a douche! It smells like fish out here." Everybody looked at me. I started looking around on the ground as if I would see a dead fish or the source of the smell. Of course, the comment was disrespectful for him to make, but I grew up on the south side of Chicago in Englewood. Some guys say stupid things to be funny, so it wasn't a big deal. But I was embarrassed because I had been having some hygiene issues recently. I waited five minutes and then I left.

When I got home, it was 5:00 p.m. I cooked dinner and awaited my boyfriend's return from work. As expected, he came in, ate dinner, and took his bath for the night. Afterward, I calmly asked him to smell me. I put my chest up to his nose while I pulled my nightgown back. "What? You smell musty," he said.

I started to cry.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

I told him I had just bathed and put on some deodorant and baby powder. "I should not be musty, but I am."

"Why don't you just take another bath?" he suggested. I thought about what that jerk had said earlier about someone needing to take a douche.

The next day, I went to see my doctor, whose name was Dr. Bloom. I thought the odor was coming from my vagina because it had an overly funky scent. I wondered if I possibly had an STD or a bacterial infection since I was having unprotected sex with my boyfriend.

I informed my doctor of my predicament, and he performed a vaginal exam and diagnosed me with a bacterial infection. He prescribed me fourteen pills to take over the next seven days.

I took them exactly as prescribed, but I continued to smell the odor. In fact, it seemed to be getting worse.

Ten days later, I returned to Dr. Bloom's office and told him I still had the odor. He gave me another prescription for the same medication.

In the meantime, I bathed daily and put on extra deodorant and baby powder. I also still spent time with my friends. Over the next six months, I would repeatedly hear comments from people saying that something smelled like shit or garbage whenever I was present. Sometimes, as soon as I walked up to some of my so-called friends, they would say, "Something stinks."

My boyfriend and I started growing apart. He did not understand what I was going through. He would always say, "It's not a big deal. You just need to switch your soap and deodorant," but I smelled terrible, and more people started to notice.

I visited Dr. Bloom four more times, complaining about my vaginal odor. I told him that more people were commenting about how I smelled. At my request, he tested me for HIV and ran other tests, all of which came back negative. On one of my visits with Dr. Bloom, he sat in a chair in the examination room, writing something in my folder. "If the odor continues...", he said as he took his finger and made a hand gesture, tapping his head as if to say the odor was in my head.

I did not overreact. "The odor is not in my head," I told him. "Other people smell me, too. Do you smell me?" I asked.

"I have never smelled an odor from you," he responded.

I did not know how to react to him saying he didn't smell an odor like feces coming from my body, one that I smelled every day. I also informed him on that visit that I had been feeling depressed. He said I should make an appointment with the nurse to see a psychiatrist.

“Okay,” I said. Growing up in the ghetto, I thought only white people saw psychiatrists, and I didn’t want to see one.

I continued seeing Dr. Bloom and two other doctors, who both said they did not smell an odor from me. Again, I did not react to these doctors saying they did not smell me, but I was overly concerned. How could they help me if they could not smell me, and why *couldn’t* they smell me?

Two more months passed, and there was still an odor coming from my vagina. It was 7:00 p.m. and I was sitting on the back porch of my apartment building. I felt sad and I couldn’t stop crying or thinking about people saying, “What’s that smell?” or “Something stinks.” I felt alone and scared. This was the first time I had felt that way.

My boyfriend had left four months earlier, but it was for the best. I hadn’t wanted to have sex or be near a man while I smelled bad. For the first time in my life, I thought that if I weren’t alive, I wouldn’t feel the pain of having this odor; I wouldn’t have to hear people commenting anymore. I began to have thoughts of killing myself to end all the embarrassment.

The next day, I called Dr. Bloom at 9:00 a.m. I told him I was feeling suicidal, and he told me to go to the hospital emergency room and talk to the nurse. I did exactly that.

I told the emergency room nurse I was feeling suicidal because I had an odor coming from my vagina. I was admitted and when I saw the doctor, he said he would run several tests to determine what was causing the odor. He returned six hours later and said he had good news: I only had a yeast infection.

I asked him, “Is that why I smell?” He said that women rarely have an odor when they have yeast infections. He prescribed me a one-dose treatment pill for yeast infections called Diflucan and said it should stop the odor. I left the hospital at 2:00 a.m.

I went home and went to bed, thinking the odor would be gone when I woke up because I'd taken the Diflucan. But at 9:30 a.m. I was home alone and still smelled an odor of trash coming from my vagina. I was in a daze; I wanted to kill myself.

Suddenly, I heard, "Carry, Carry!" I opened the window to see my father and Sherry standing outside. He told me he had errands to run for the day, so I needed to watch Sherry for several hours. My father had taken over parenting my daughter for the last seven months. I hadn't cooked for her or combed her hair since I'd developed the odor. All I cared about was stopping the odor. I had not told my daughter I loved her for several months. Being a mother to my daughter was too much for me to manage; I had to stop the odor first.

"Mama, I'm hungry," Sherry said when she entered the apartment.

"Make yourself something to eat," I said. Before my father took over as my daughter's parental guardian, he noticed that I let her cook hot dogs and eggs for herself. Sherry ironed her clothes for school and combed her hair, too. All I did was cry about the odor.

Sherry put two hot dogs on the stove. I was crying and had no strength to take care of her.

I was suicidal.

I walked back and forth through the apartment. I picked up a knife and imagined cutting my wrists and ending all the pain. My daughter noticed and started crying. "Mama, what is wrong? Why are you crying?" She asked. I told her to sit down, but she kept asking, "Mama, what's wrong?" I smacked her in the face so hard that her face turned red. I hugged her and apologized, but she continued asking why I was crying. She put so much pressure on me, and I could not handle her then. I felt scared. The knife was still in my hand. Before I hurt myself or Sherry, I needed to call the police.

I put the knife down and told Sherry to sit down and watch TV while I went to use the pay phone on the corner. I called the police. "My name is Carry Wilson," I told the police operator. "I am suicidal, and I have my daughter with me."

"Do not hang up the phone," she replied. "I am sending the police to you right now. Is your daughter next to you right now?"

"No, she's alone in the apartment," I said.

"It's going to be okay. The police are on their way," she assured me. "What color shirt do you have on?" she asked.

"Red," I replied. Standing at the pay phone, I prayed to God to help me. "You should be able to see the police car," the operator told me.

"I do," I said.

A police officer got out of the car. "Ms. Wilson?" he said. "Yes."

"Let's go get your daughter," he said.

We went upstairs and got Sherry. The officer took me and Sherry to Jackson Park hospital which was one mile from my apartment. Riding in the back of the police car, I felt numb to my surroundings. I could not feel my daughter's hug or hear her voice.

The officer took us straight to the emergency room at the back of the hospital, and I told the nurse I was suicidal. The nurse asked me if anybody could come to get my daughter, and I gave her the telephone number of Sherry's godparents. She then led me to a room with no windows or a bed.

She returned to the room three hours later and told me my daughter's godparents had picked her up and asked how I was doing. I saw a psychiatrist after another five hours.

"Ms. Wilson, my name is Dr. Sanders," he said. "How can I help you?"

"I have an odor coming from my vagina, and doctors keep saying there is no odor," I told him. "I cannot take it anymore.

People smell me and make mean comments whenever I'm present. Mean comments like, 'What's that smell?' or 'It stinks like a dead rat in here,'"

Dr. Sander asked me if I heard voices when no one was around, and I asked him if *he* heard voices when no one was around.

"Of course not! I am not crazy," I said.

"I didn't say you were crazy," he said. "I do not smell an odor from you right now." I cried and begged him to help me.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"I just want to stop the odor," I said. "But I keep thinking about killing myself." Dr. Sander told me to get some rest and that he would give me some help.

I awoke to a knock on the door; it was the nurse. She brought me a sandwich and informed me they were waiting for an ambulance to transfer me to the University of Illinois Hospital. I asked her if she knew the time.

"Midnight," she replied. She told me my daughter's godparents had called to check on me again. "They wanted to know if we were releasing you from the hospital tonight. I told them I would tell you to call them when you could."

I did not want to call them; I felt embarrassed because I was suicidal and could not control my emotions. I felt like I was losing my mind. Doctors kept saying, "There is no odor coming from your vagina," but I had an odor. I knew they were wrong.

A knock on the door made me jump as I sat on the bed eating the sandwich. The nurse said, "The ambulance is here for you." I was shaking because it was cold in the hospital. My head hurt from crying all day, and I was still having thoughts of killing myself. The ride in the ambulance was scary. I had never been in an ambulance, so I hoped to return to the other hospital fast.

When we got to the hospital, the ambulance driver put me in a wheelchair, took me straight to the back of the emergency

room, and handed a nurse my folder. They put me in another room with no windows or a bed. As she wrote in my folder, the nurse asked how I felt.

“I am feeling suicidal,” I told her. “Why?” she asked.

“I have an odor coming from my vagina,” I said. She looked up and directly into my eyes. I was embarrassed but felt so sad; I just wanted help.

She asked me how I would kill myself. I said I would cut my wrist or take pills as I started to cry. I did not like having thoughts like that.

“Why do you think you have this odor?” she asked.

“I don’t know what is causing it,” I said. I told her that people make mean comments about me because I have this odor, and doctors said they don’t smell me. The nurse told me to change into a hospital gown and that the doctor would be in soon. She returned to the room two hours later, putting my clothes in a bag. I asked her if she smelled an odor when she entered the room.

“No,” she said, “but your clothes have an odor.”

Another five hours went by before the doctor entered the room. He was looking at a folder in his hand and said, “Hi, Ms. Wilson. I see here that you’re suicidal because you think you have an odor coming from your vagina.”

“I do not *think* I have an odor; I do,” I said.

He asked me the same question the other doctor had asked: “Do you hear voices when no one else is around?”

I said no, but he asked me more questions. “Can you see things other people cannot?” “No.”

“Who is the president?” “Bill Clinton.”

“What day is it?” “Tuesday.”

“What is your name?” “Carry Wilson.”

“Where are you at right now?” “University of Illinois Hospital.” “Why are you at the hospital?”

“I have a foul odor coming from my vagina, and doctors are saying there is no odor, and I just don’t want to live anymore.”

He asked me if I wanted to hurt myself. “Yes, to stop the pain, I replied.”

He asked me if I was hungry. I said, “No.”

He informed me that someone would come to pick me up soon. A few minutes later, a nurse took me straight to my room in the mental ward upstairs. I sat on the bed and looked around. The room had a chair, a bed, and a table with soap, toothpaste, a toothbrush, and hospital scrubs sitting on it. I also had a bathroom in my room. The room looked gloomy, but I felt safe. I no longer had to see my neighbors or hear their comments. I did not want to be in society anymore.

There was a knock on the door, and a nurse came in. “Hi,” she said. “My name is Carol, and I’ll be your nurse. You can come to the dayroom and eat breakfast.”

I didn’t know what to expect as I walked toward the dayroom. There was a long table with about twenty chairs up against it. There were two bookshelves full of books, two long couches, and a TV with a sign that read, “Do Not Turn TV To Jerry Springer.”

As I stood there, patients walked past me and went to sit at the table. The nurse began calling their names so they could get their breakfast trays.

“Come sit over here,” another woman patient said to me. I stood there in shock, thinking, *I do not need to be here. I am not crazy.* At that point, the other patients weren’t acting crazy either.

One patient walked past me and I saw at least twenty long scars across her arms, as if someone had cut her repeatedly. I was extremely uncomfortable but hungry, and the woman who told me to sit by her looked normal. I sat next to her and started eating. The girl with the scars on her arms asked me, “What is wrong with you? You look normal.”

I told her I was feeling suicidal. She held her arms straight out across the table toward me and said her mother was a bitch and that she cut her arms up to hurt her mother.

“What did you cut your arms with?” I asked. She laughed and said, “A razor blade.”

The woman who asked me to sit by her kicked my foot under the table while I talked to the girl who had cut herself. The girl got up to put her tray back on the food rack. “I was kicking you, trying to tell you not to talk to that girl,” the woman said.

“Why?” I asked.

“That girl is crazy. She cut herself up to hurt her mother, but her mother is at home, and she is here with her arms all cut the fuck up. Who do you think is hurting, her or her mother?”

What’s your name?” she asked me. “Carry,” I replied.

“I’m Teresa, she said. “You look too young to have any problems that would make you suicidal.”

I told her, “I just don’t feel well.”

Teresa said her family put her in the hospital mental ward so they could get her SSI check every month. She was forty years old, but she looked at least sixty. She talked and acted normally, but I later realized she had a drug addiction.

When I returned my breakfast tray, a doctor approached me. “Carry Wilson?” he asked. “Yes, I replied.”

“I need to speak to you in your room,” he said. “My name is Dr. Rolston, and I will be your doctor.” I asked him if he was a psychiatrist.

“Yes, I am,” he replied. He asked me the same questions the other psychiatrist had asked.

But he also asked me to tell him about my childhood.

“No, I am not talking to you about my childhood because my childhood has nothing to do with why I am here,” I said. “My childhood did not make me depressed. I am depressed because I

have an odor coming from my vagina, and doctors keep saying there is no odor, and I do not want to live anymore,” I cried.

“I want to give you some medicine to help you relax,” said the doctor. “I am not taking any psychological medicine,” I told him.

“Do you want me to help you?” he asked.

“Yes, I want you to find out why I have this odor coming from my vagina.”

Dr. Rolston said, “Ms. Wilson, can I try to smell you?” I nodded. He circled me, sniffing my armpits and body. He said, “I cannot smell an odor from you.” He told me I needed to get dressed for the group.

After showering and putting on my clothes, I sat on the bed. I started crying because yet another doctor had told me he could not smell me. I had seen many doctors, and they all said the same thing. They could not smell me. I sat on that bed thinking, *why don't the doctors take a piece of my tissue from my body and see if it is rotten or check if there is a dead baby in me?*

Something was wrong. I'd had this odor for several months and had seen doctor after doctor. They had checked for STDs and prescribed me antibiotics, but the odor never stopped. I could not understand why I needed antibiotics. I was not having sex; I smelled too bad. My so-called friends were some of the very people who commented about my odor, making me depressed. When I was on the bus or in a grocery store, people moved away from me and turned up their noses when they looked at me and coughed a lot around me. These incidents stopped being coincidences a long time ago. I always knew when people were reacting to my body odor. I sat on the bed crying until I heard a knock on the door and Carol, the nurse appeared.

“Come on, Carry. It's time for the group,” she said. Walking toward her, I asked, “What is the group?”

“All the patients sit in a circle in the middle of the

dayroom,” she explained. “We all get to know each other.”

In the dayroom, I sat next to Teresa, who had saved me a seat next to her.

“Hi, everybody,” Carol began. She pointed to a man and said, “This is Kent, and he is a nurse on this floor as well.”

“Everybody who came in this morning or last night, when I point to you, stand up and tell us your name and why you are here,” Kent said. He then pointed to a guy who stood up.

“Hi, my name is Greg, and I’m depressed,” he said by way of introduction. “Hi Greg,” everyone responded in unison.

Kent pointed to a girl. She stood up and spoke loudly. “Hi. My name is Erica, and I do not want to be here, but it is okay. God will take care of me and all of us.”

“Okay, Erica, you can sit down now,” Carol said, but Erica kept talking. Kent got up, grabbed Erica by the hand, and led her out of the dayroom. Carol told me to wait until Kent came back before I spoke.

Kent came back after ten minutes without Erica and pointed to me. I stood up and said, “Hi. My name is Carry, and I am depressed and suicidal.”

Everyone said, “Hi, Carry!”

The group was a promising idea. It gave patients a chance to talk about their feelings. We all wanted to improve so we could return to society, be better people, and lead everyday lives.

After the group, I called my daughter and my father. It felt good to hear Sherry’s voice.

My father asked if I wanted him to visit me. I told him no; I did not want him to see me in a mental hospital.

Afterward, I ate lunch and talked to a counselor for twenty minutes about how I felt. I told her I felt safe in the mental ward. After the counselor left, I read medical books I found on the shelves until 5:00 p.m., when it was time for dinner. After dinner, I watched TV.

It was 7:00 p.m. when Kent walked into the dayroom with a tray of food and set it on the table. Erica came in, walking slowly behind Kent. Her eyes looked closed, but they were open. She waved and said, “Heeeeeeeeyyyyyy, everybody,” with a slur like she was in slow motion. I watched her closely as she sat there eating her food. She drooled uncontrollably and fell asleep while eating. I became concerned about Erica. After seeing her so vocal that morning, she was acting like she was a zombie.

As we all looked at Erica, Teresa whispered in my ear, “If you keep telling these doctors you want to kill yourself, they’re going to put you on some fucked up medicine like that.” She pointed to Erica. Seeing Erica behave like that confirmed my belief that psychological drugs turn sane people crazy. I knew I would never take any psychological medication. Erica remained in that zombielike state until the day I left the mental ward.

The next morning, Dr. Rolston saw me in my room. He asked if I still smelled the odor. I said yes.

“I want you to get a CT scan today after lunch,” he said.

After I got the CT scan, he came into the dayroom and told me that he needed to speak to me in my room.

When we got there, he told me, “Your CT scan showed no abnormalities, and I want to start you on medication to help you stop thinking about the odor.”

“What is this medicine for?” I asked Dr. Rolston.

“It will treat the delusions you have that make you think you have body odor,” he explained. “You have a chemical imbalance.”

I asked him, “What if I have an odor and you’re wrong? If I take this medicine, isn’t it going to cause a chemical imbalance that was not there before?” I honestly thought that if I took medication for delusions, which I did not have, the medication would somehow chemically change my brain and lead to an imbalance. Also, I knew I had the odor, and the doctor was wrong.

Dr. Rolston avoided answering my question. Instead he said, “That will not happen; this medicine will help you.”

“I would feel much better if you could just send me to a specialist, not a gynecologist,” I said. “Since my body odor started, all I have seen are gynecologists, and they could not stop the odor.” In 1996, I thought all doctors were the same, but after reading books in the hospital, I realized there are diverse medical fields and specialties. I begged him to let me see if one more doctor could help me. He said he would look into getting me the name and address of a doctor before they discharged me.

For the next two days, I felt better. I felt ready to go home to see my daughter and a new type of doctor. I had been in the ward for six days and five nights.

On my last day in the ward, Dr. Rolston came to see me before breakfast and asked me how I felt.

“I’m eager to see the new doctor you will refer me to.” I said. He asked me if I still smelled the odor.

“Yes,” I said.

“Would you just consider taking the medicine?” he asked.

“No,” I told him. “I am going to be okay.” I was hopeful the new doctor would help me eliminate the odor.

I ate breakfast and talked to Teresa. She told me she had been in the ward for twenty days because she would not let the

doctors tell her what to do.

“Good luck if I never see you again,” I told her.

Carol finally arrived at noon and said, “Carry, it’s time to go.”

I hugged Teresa and went to the front desk of the ward. The discharge nurse handed me a referral to Dr. Sarah Landry’s clinic and a bag with a toothbrush, toothpaste, water jug, wash pan, and a token to catch the bus. As I got on the elevator, Carol ran up to me and tried to hand me the prescription for that medicine.

“No, I’m not taking that,” I said.

“Carry, please, just in case you need it,” she persisted. I shook my head as the elevator door closed. When I got outside, I felt the wind against my skin and smelled the air. It felt so good.

As soon as I got home and opened the door to my apartment, a horrible scent assaulted me. My apartment smelled like mildew. I almost cried but was hopeful the new doctor would stop the odor. I called my father and told him that I was home. I asked him to let me speak to Sherry.

“Mama are you at home?” she said over the phone.

“Yes. Granddaddy is going to bring you home soon,” I said. Talking to my daughter always made me feel better about living.

I called the doctor’s office from the pay phone on the corner and got an appointment for the next day at 10:00 a.m. I went back to my apartment and opened all the windows. I mopped the floors with half a gallon of bleach; I would rather the apartment smelled like too much bleach than my odor, which smelled like urine, trash, or rotten food. People said different things about how I smelled.

Then I fried some chicken and made rice. It had been several months since I had cooked dinner for my daughter. It felt good to act normally for a change.

When my father and daughter arrived, my father

immediately came in, made Sherry a plate of food, and told her to sit down and eat it.

“Your mother and I are stepping out into the hallway to talk,” he told her. I did not know what my father would say. We stepped into the hallway and left the door ajar. My father spoke very seriously and told me that I needed to get through whatever I was going through, get a job, and care for Sherry. He said he was getting older and could not care for Sherry daily; if she were a boy, it would be easier for him to run around with her. He added, “Some people just smell how they smell.” That destroyed me. He told me, “Those doctors spent years in medical school. They have licenses and degrees, and you are trying to tell them they’re wrong.” I respect my father very much. He knows I love life, love to work, and want to succeed. My father is the person who taught me to stand up for what I believe in. So it hurt when he told me to get over the fact that I smelled like shit and to go back to work no matter what.

All I could say was, “Daddy, the doctors are wrong. Something has gone wrong in my body.” I told him I was going to the doctor the next day and would be okay. My father shook his head in disappointment that I was continuing to see doctors, but this was my life. I asked him if he could loan me money until I got my welfare check; I needed bus fare to get to the doctor. I also asked him if he could watch Sherry for me the following day until I got back from the doctor.

He said with frustration, “I am going to give you this money, but this time, if this doctor says there is nothing wrong, you need to get a job and start being a mother to Sherry. School starts soon. She needs school supplies and clothes.” I took twenty dollars out of his hand.

“Thank you, and the doctor will help me this time,” I said.

After a few hours, Sherry and my father left and I went to

bed extra early. I awoke at 8:00

a.m. I took my bath and headed down the hallway to the exit. There were fifteen other apartments in the building. Walking down the hall, two other women who lived in the building passed me. “Good morning,” I said.

They said hello, and then one said, “This whole hallway smells like mildew.”

As I turned to go down the stairs, I stopped and almost cried. I put towels at the bottom of my apartment’s front and back doors to stop my odor from entering the hallway.

I made it to the doctor’s office at 9:20 a.m. I filled out the patient history forms and waited forty minutes before the nurse called my name and led me into the exam room. The doctor came in a few minutes later.

“Hi, Ms. Wilson,” she said. “I am Dr. Landry.” She looked like a good doctor. She looked at my folder and said, “I see you have an odor coming from your vagina.”

“Yes,” I said.

“Do you have any itching or discharge?” she asked. “No,” I said.

“What type of douche do you use?” she asked. I started crying. She put her hand on my knee and asked, “Why are you crying?”

“You are just like the other doctors,” I said. “Every day, I wash my body with soap and water. I douche once a month. The doctors have been giving me antibiotics for several months, and the odor will not stop.”

“Ms. Wilson,” she said, “I see here you said the other doctors said they did not smell you. I do not smell an odor from you, but that does not mean you do not have an odor.” She asked me what types of food I ate, informing me that certain foods could sometimes contribute to body odor. “The odor comes out through your sweat.”

“Just regular food,” I said.

“I will tell you what I will do,” she said. “I will do a vaginal exam and run some tests after the exam. I want you to douche with the cleanser Betadine and use Arm & Hammer deodorant. Get some Arm & Hammer baking soda, and if you do not wear pantyliners now, start wearing them. Put a little Arm & Hammer baking soda in your vaginal area.” She told me not to worry so much. “Everything is going to be okay. I will see you in two weeks.”

When I left Dr. Landry’s office, I was hopeful that all these hygiene steps would stop my odor. I stopped at the store and bought everything she had told me to purchase. That night, after I bathed, I douched with the cleanser, put on the deodorant, and sprinkled some Arm & Hammer baking soda on the panty-liner before I put it on. I noticed the odor was not foul anymore; it was fresh. I wanted the odor to stop, so I made myself believe that the odor was gone. I kept smelling myself all day, and I did not smell foul. I did not stop eating the food I had always eaten.

It was not like Dr. Landry said. “Carry. If you eat spicy food, your body will have an odor.”

I got my welfare check and had to buy food and my daughter’s school clothes and supplies. I bought some more hygiene products, and I felt better. My father paid my rent and light bill, and I felt confident enough to look for a job. It took less than two weeks to find a job at a hotel as a housekeeper.

I saw Dr. Landry one more time before I started working. I told her the odor was not foul anymore. She hugged me and said she was happy I felt much better. I informed her I would like to get a procedure that would stop me from having a menstrual cycle. I told her I was worried I would have to use extra hygiene products every month when my cycle came, so I wanted to stop my menstrual cycle altogether.

“You are too young,” she said. “You should not do anything

drastic to stop your monthly cycle. Let me give you a pregnancy test right now, and if it is negative, I will start you on birth control pills. When you are supposed to stop the old pack and start on the new pack of pills, keep taking them, and your period will stop.” I asked her if that was safe to do. “Yes, it will stop your period,” she replied.

I started work four days later. On my first day of work, everything was okay. On the second day of work, as I walked down the hotel hallway and passed another housekeeper, she bent the top half of her body away from me as she passed. I’d had no problem the day before so I did not overreact to her odd behavior. However, when all the housekeepers went downstairs to the lunchroom for lunch, I sat alone at a table that could have fit at least five other people; they all chose to stand.

While eating my lunch, I heard a male housekeeper tell another housekeeper, “You need to tell Tanya (the housekeeping supervisor) that the twelfth-floor stinks. It smells like shit up there.” I immediately panicked; I had worked on the twelfth floor on my first day. I stood up and went straight to the pay phone in the hotel lobby.

I called Dr. Landry’s office and told the nurse I needed to speak to the doctor. I started crying uncontrollably.

“Ms. Wilson, what’s wrong?” Dr. Landry asked.

“This odor is still here,” I said. “Nothing has changed. People are still talking about me.

Please help me.” I felt like I would drop to the floor; my knees felt weak.

“I don’t know what to tell you,” Dr. Landry said. “Your test results were negative. There is no reason you should have body odor. As a gynecologist, I have done everything I can for you. The only thing I can think of doing is talking to a dermatologist to see if they have ever heard of anything like this.” I could not stop crying. I had never seen a dermatologist. She asked me if I

was feeling depressed or suicidal.

“No,” I replied. “I just want to stop this odor.”

Dr. Landry told me she would talk to the dermatologist the following day and that I should call her at 11:00 a.m. the next day.

“Thank you,” I said, wiping my tears before returning to work. I was extremely uncomfortable. Whenever my supervisor came close to me to check my room chart, I became physically nervous. I could not wait to get off work. When I clocked out, I said goodnight to everybody. Neither my supervisor nor coworkers said, “Goodbye” or “We will see you tomorrow.” I knew they heard me speak to them. I never understood why people disliked me; I smelled bad, but I was still a good person. I left work in tears.

When I got home, my father and daughter were there. My father looked at me and said, “You’ve been crying. You aren’t going back to work, are you?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

That night, when I lay down to sleep, I looked at my daughter. I thought I could not care for you while I was like this. I could feel myself getting depressed and having suicidal again. I lay in bed and decided I was not returning to the hotel. I would rather talk to the dermatologist with Dr. Landry and tell them directly about my vaginal odor. I did not know what a dermatologist was, but I knew they were not gynecologists.

The next morning, my father woke me up at 6:00 a.m. He asked me if I was going to work. “Yes, I am.” I lied to him so he would watch Sherry. I did not want to have to be a mother to her that day. I know that sounds bad, but I was an emotional wreck.

When my father and Sherry left, my father yelled at me, “Stop putting towels under the door! No one has a problem with the way you smell. No one says anything to me about you smelling bad.” My father thought people would walk up to him

and say, “Your daughter Carry smells terrible,” and since that didn’t happen, he assumed there was no problem.

I left home at 9:30 a.m. When the bus made it to the hospital district, I got off at a stop I wouldn’t normally get off at because I wanted to kill some time. It was only 10:00 a.m. Dr.

Landry had told me to call her back at 11:00 a.m., but I wanted to give her time to talk to the dermatologist.

As I walked down the street looking at the buildings, I saw a sign in front of a gigantic building on Polk Street that read, “The University of Chicago Health and Science Library.” The words “Health and Science” made me want to enter the library. I had always thought doctors needed to examine a piece of my tissue under a microscope to figure out what was causing the odor.

I approached the receptionist. I was so embarrassed, but I asked her if the library had any books on female body odors. She clicked a few buttons on the computer and said, “No, not under that title.” She offered, “Let me try a different title.” She clicked more and said, “We have a book titled *The Human Body Odor*.” She wrote down the row and floor. I could not find the book, but the librarian helped me.

On the front of the book, in big letters, was the title, *The Human Body Odor*, and on the back of the book was a small paragraph: “The etiology and treatment of sweat gland surgery, hair loss, and body odor.” I immediately became intrigued. Was the cure for my vaginal odor in this book? I turned to the index. There were contents for body odor and the smell of feces, body odor and bacterial infections, case reports of people with a condition called bromhidrosis (of course, I could not pronounce the conditions correctly), and testing methods for body odor.

I turned to the section on body odor and the smell of feces; it documented how patients with bromhidrosis would complain of smelling like feces. I turned to the case reports, and one case stood out. A nineteen-year-old female complained of having a

foul body odor. She complained about how people commented on her body odor, turned their noses up, or opened windows when she was present. The dermatologists who treated her were the authors of the book. They stated that there was no objective odor present; however, these dermatologists understood the condition and knew there were testing methods other than smelling the odor from the patient. The dermatologists performed sweat gland removal surgery on this patient.

I almost fell to the floor, crying. As I continued to read, I became convinced I had this condition. I concluded that the odor was also coming from my armpits and between my breasts. The odor was not inside my vagina but coming from the vaginal wall. I knew I needed to get my sweat glands removed.

I looked up at the clock; it was 11:45 a.m. I was late. I had to get this book to Dr. Landry and the dermatologist. I could show them that a person could have a body odor that some people smell and others do not. I had learned from the book that everyone's perception of smell is different; what smells foul to me may not smell foul to someone else. I smelled horrible. How could any doctor smell me and not perceive the odor as foul? I never really understood completely. But as doctors, Dr. Landry and the dermatologist would understand these concepts.

As I left the library, I stopped at the check-out desk. I handed the book to the clerk and told her I wanted to check the book out. I pulled out my state ID and gave it to the librarian.

When she looked at my ID, she told me that I had to be a student or a doctor at the hospital or university to check the book out.

I told her, "I will just ask my doctor to return and get the book." The clerk made me a copy of the front and back of the book. I thought it would be a good idea to show Dr. Landry a copy of the book's title and the paragraph on the back. I was in overdrive to show her I had discovered what was wrong with me!

I made it to the clinic and told Dr. Landry's nurse I needed to speak with Dr. Landry. "We are busy today. Do you have an appointment?" she asked.

"Please tell Dr. Landry I must see her immediately," I pleaded. I waited twenty minutes, but it seemed like an hour.

"Ms. Wilson, I can see you now," Dr. Landry said. When we got into the examination room, I gave her the copies of the front and back of the book. As she read, I anxiously told her about bromhidrosis! I told her about the book, especially about sweat gland removal surgery.

"This is some useful information," she said. "I am so proud of you." I told her, "I cannot check the book out, but you can."

She told me I needed to see my primary care physician and tell him about the book.

"What about the dermatologist you spoke with today?" I asked her. "The authors of the book are dermatologists."

She said, "I have not spoken with the dermatologist today, but you can go upstairs and make an appointment in the dermatology department."

I left her office with no medical records to show the dermatologist. I went upstairs to the dermatology department. The nurse asked if I had a referral after I signed in.

"No," I said, "but my doctor told me I could just come up here and make an appointment."

The nurse said, "You need a referral from your primary care doctor to see a dermatologist."

I said "Ok," and thanked her. I did not like my primary care doctor. Dr. Bloom had made it clear that he did not smell an odor coming from me and thought I needed to see a psychiatrist. But I had no choice but to get a referral from him. I had to see him again.

The next morning, my father and daughter came home early. I told my father I had a doctor's appointment. My father said,

with anger in his voice, “You need to get this girl ready for school.” I hadn’t noticed that school was starting soon.

“Daddy, I just need you to help me a little longer until I can find out what is wrong with me,” I said. I knew I could not show him the papers on bromhidrosis or tell him about the book. He would say I was chasing a ghost again.

My father told me he had spoken with my sister Candice in New Orleans and asked her to consider letting my daughter Sherry live with her for a little while.

I asked him, “Did she say yes?”

“Would you let her go?” my father asked.

“Hell yeah,” I said. My daughter put too much pressure on me, and I was an emotional wreck, but I had hope again. I had found a book that explained what was wrong with me. No doctor could tell me I did not have a body odor.

I kissed Sherry and told her I would see her later. I made it to my primary care doctor’s office at 9:00 a.m. The nurse led me into the exam room, and Dr. Bloom came in a few minutes later.

“Hi, Ms. Wilson. How can I help you?”

“I need a referral to see a dermatologist. I need to get my sweat glands removed,” I said. “A dermatologist will not remove your sweat glands,” he told me.

“Whatever,” I said, dismissively. “I need to get a referral from you.” “Ms. Wilson, I do not see a reason to refer you to a dermatologist.” I lost it. I cursed and cried.

Dr. Bloom’s nurse came into the exam room and said, “Ms. Wilson, you need to lower your voice.” But I continued to curse at Dr. Bloom.

She said, “I think you should leave, Ms. Wilson.”

Walking toward the door, I said, “Dr. Bloom, are you going to give me the fucking referral or not?”

“There is no reason for seeing a dermatologist,” he said.

I left Dr. Bloom's office in despair. I went to the first payphone I saw and called my HMO medical insurance provider.

"My primary care doctor refused to refer me to a dermatologist," I told the HMO phone agent. "I am depressed and suicidal because I have a foul odor coming from my body. The only specialists who can help me are the dermatologists who have written a book explaining my medical condition."

"Do you think you will hurt yourself?" the operator asked me. "I just need to see a dermatologist," I pleaded.

"I am scared to let you off the phone," she said. "I can feel the pain in your voice. If you have problems with your current doctor, you must switch your primary care doctor, which will take about two weeks. If you feel you will hurt yourself before then, please go to an emergency room."

"Okay," I said.

When I got home, some of my neighbors were sitting outside in front of the apartment building.

"Hi, Carry. Come and chill out with us," one of them said. I kept walking straight past them and did not even look at them.

When I made it up to my apartment, I felt depressed and could not stop crying. I felt like I was going to throw up. I had to talk to myself. I did not want to become depressed; the doctors would admit me back into the psychiatric ward. I told myself it was going to be all right. *Stay strong, Carry, you can make it.* I always asked God to stay with me. *You will get the help you need.*

When Sherry and my father came home that night, I had to stop crying and put on a phony smile, but I wanted to be alone. My father told me he was taking my daughter to New Orleans because school had started there, and he wanted Sherry to get caught up. He said they would leave in a week. He insisted I call my sister Candice to thank her for letting Sherry come and stay

with her.

I went to my neighbor Lewis's apartment and asked him to let me call my sister. I paid Lewis to let jobs I had applied for leave me messages on his answering service, so he sometimes let me use his phone.

"Hey, little sister, I miss you so much," my sister hollered. We had not seen each other in about three years. We had been close when I was a little girl; my father would be at work, and my sister was my mother, sister, and best friend. "Carry, I am worried about you," she said.

I told her, "I have a medical condition, but I am getting help soon, and I will be down there to get Sherry back as soon as I get cured."

My sister asked me to move to New Orleans, but I told her I loved living in Chicago.

Chicago is a great city with many great opportunities. If a person takes advantage of those opportunities, they could become successful. Besides, my first love, Evan, lived in Chicago. But I had to admit that I was both happy and sad that my daughter was leaving. I was relieved Sherry would be in a safe environment and I could finally focus all my energy and time on removing my sweat glands.

When my father returned to Chicago after dropping my daughter off in New Orleans, he said Sherry was crying when he left, and he told her I would be there to see her soon. "Carry, whatever you are doing, get it done, and get your ass back to work," my father said.

I finally received my new doctor's name and address: Dr. White. I called the clinic and made an appointment for the next day. I was so excited about the new appointment that I watched TV for the first time in several months. I disliked watching TV; I disliked seeing people laughing and enjoying life. But I was so excited about seeing a new doctor that I felt well enough to watch

TV and laugh along with the sitcoms.

Someone outside yelled, “Carry, Carry!” while I was watching TV. I did not look out the window, but I recognized the voice of one of my so-called best friends, Daisy, whom I had known for over fifteen years. I turned the TV down and went to hide in my bathroom, just in case one of my neighbors let Daisy in through the front door of the building. I did not want to let her into my apartment; she would return to my old neighborhood and tell everyone we knew that I still smelled bad. On more than one occasion, Daisy had made comments around me that something smelled like garbage. I would not let her humiliate me. I did not consider her my friend anymore.

Finally, after twenty minutes, I came out of the bathroom. She was gone. I went to bed early again to make it to my 10:00 a.m. appointment with my new doctor.

I made it to the doctor’s office at 9:30 a.m. I wrote on the patient information form that I needed a referral to see a dermatologist. The nurse called me and led me to an examination room. Dr. White came in ten minutes later, looking at the information in my folder.

“Hi, Ms. Wilson,” he said, “I am Dr. White. Why do you need to see a dermatologist?” “I have a foul odor coming from my body,” I said. “At least six doctors have said they

don’t smell the odor from me. *The Human Body Odor* is a book I found. I relate to this condition, bromhidrosis, that is in the book.” I handed him copies of the back and front of the book.

After reading the copies, Dr. White told me to lie on the table so he could examine me, which consisted of him pushing down on my stomach and asking me if I felt pain. He told me to sit up, and he looked down my throat and into my ears. “Ms. Wilson, I do not smell an odor from you,” he said.

I said, “In this book, the dermatologist did not smell the odor from the patient, but they still removed her sweat glands. There

are other testing methods besides smelling an odor.”

“Where is this book?” he asked.

“The University Library on Polk Street.” You are a doctor; you can get the book.” I told him again, “I need to see a dermatologist.”

I was wearing a miniskirt and had put baby oil on my legs. “Ms. Wilson, nothing is wrong with you.” Dr. White said after examining me. “Look at your legs; you look good.”

I started crying. “I don’t care how good I look. I have a foul odor coming from my body.” “Why are you crying?” he asked.

“I need to see a dermatologist!”

“I am not giving you a referral, but I will get the book and read it,” he told me. I cried so much that Dr. White asked me if I was depressed.

“Yes!” I yelled. “Doctor after doctor keeps telling me I do not have a body odor, and I do.”

He gave me a tissue and said he would perform a pelvic examination to see if I had a bacterial infection that could cause a minor odor.

“I do not need a pelvic exam,” I said. “I do not have sex with anyone, and the odor is not minor. As a doctor, you should know that people with bacterial infections do not have body odor.”

“Ms. Wilson, please stop trying to be a doctor, and since you are refusing to let me examine you for a bacterial infection, I will get the book and give you a return appointment for two weeks.” He asked me the name of the book again.

“I just showed you the paper with the book’s title,” I said as I cried uncontrollably. “Ms. Wilson, please lie down until you calm down, and I will give you a return appointment for one week.”

“No, I am leaving,” I said.

As soon as I got home, I closed all the curtains in the apartment, went into the bathroom, and closed the door. I turned

off the lights and got under the bathroom sink in a fetal position. I cried. I felt all alone and scared. I had intense thoughts about committing suicide. There were a lot of reasons to kill myself. I started to think Dr. Bloom was calling these other doctors and telling them that I was crazy and that they shouldn't help me. Why else would every doctor I see keep saying that I did not have a body odor? I wanted to die.

I awoke to a knock on my front door. I did not want to answer it, but I did. My legs were stiff as I got up from under the bathroom sink. It was my neighbor, Lewis, from downstairs. "A doctor is on the phone for you," he yelled.

I opened the door. "What time is it?" I asked. He said it was 4:00 p.m. "I will be right down," I told him.

For four hours, I had slept under the bathroom sink. When I picked up the phone, I didn't know which doctor was calling.

"Hello?" It was Dr. White, the doctor I had seen earlier that day.

"Hi, Ms. Wilson," he said. "I have not been able to stop thinking about you since you left the clinic this morning. I want to get you some help. You need to go to the emergency room at Touro Hospital and ask for me."

I did not know what type of help he thought he could give me, but I knew I needed help. When I got to the hospital emergency room, I asked the nurse for Dr. White.

"What is your name?" she asked. "Carry Wilson," I replied.

"You can come with me," she said.

We got on the elevator and got off on the fourth floor. She led me to a regular hospital room with a bed and a TV. "You can put on that hospital gown," she said, pointing toward the bed.

I asked her what was going on. She told me Dr. White would be in to see me soon. I sat on the bed and started crying. I still felt suicidal.

The nurse came back into the room an hour later. "Are you

okay?" she asked. I said no.

"Come with me," she said, leading me to the bathroom in the room. "Go put on your gown and lay down in the bed. I will get you some apple juice." I put on the gown and lay down on the bed. The nurse brought me some crackers and apple juice, but I did not eat them. I fell asleep.

I awoke to a knock on the door. It was Dr. White.

"Hi, Ms. Wilson. The nurse told me you were crying." He asked me questions as he wrote in a folder. He asked me if I still thought I had a body odor; I said yes. He asked me if I was still feeling depressed; I said yes.

"Are you having thoughts of hurting yourself?" he asked. I said yes. "I was worried about you when you left my office," he told me.

"Is that why you brought me here?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said. I hoped he had brought me back to help me with my body odor. "I just want the odor to stop," I said.

He asked, "When you think about hurting yourself, what do you think you will do?" "I don't know," I said. I did not want to talk to him.

"I want to give you something to help you sleep," he told me.

"No, I am not taking any medicine," I said. "The medicine will help you relax," he said.

I said no, and he left the room. Throughout the night, Dr. White returned to the room with papers for me to sign. I didn't read the papers I was signing.

Dr. White said, "We are waiting to transfer you by ambulance to the University of Illinois Hospital."

"To the mental ward?" I asked.

"You will get the help you need there," he replied.

I did not care; I wanted to go back to the mental ward. I

wanted to be away from the world again.

At 4:00 a.m., I arrived at the University of Illinois Hospital. They took me straight to the mental ward on the same floor but put me in a different room. I lay in bed, and a psychiatrist came into the room a few hours later.

“Ms. Wilson, I know you came into the hospital this morning and are sleepy, but I need to speak with you,” he said. I got out of bed and sat on a chair.

“I will be your doctor,” he said. “My name is Dr. Walsh.” He handed me a banana and apple juice. He asked questions while writing in a folder. “Why are you feeling suicidal?”

“I have a foul odor coming from my body. Doctors keep saying there is no odor, but I smell the odor, and other people around me smell the odor; I cannot even keep a job because of the odor,” I told him. “I am poor. I cannot even take care of myself,” I continued.

He asked me, “What started the odor?”

“Like I told the other doctors, I don’t know. But I found a book about a condition that causes a person to have a foul body odor, and I relate to the condition one hundred percent. The book has all the answers in it. You are a university doctor; you can get the book this morning. The library is less than two blocks from here.”

He asked me the book’s name and wrote it down. “Did something happen right before the odor started?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “In the book, it’s a medical condition.” I asked if he could smell me. “No, I do not smell you,” he said.

“I need to see a dermatologist because the book’s authors are dermatologists, and they understand the condition,” I explained.

“I want you to get a CT scan later,” he said.

“I already had one done the first time I was here,” I explained, “and whatever it showed, the doctor still said I didn’t have a body odor. He was wrong, so I don’t see the point in a CT

scan.”

“Well, I want to get another one done. You can go eat breakfast now, and then I want you to get some rest,” he said, leaving my room.

As I walked out of my room, going to the dayroom to eat breakfast, I passed Carol. “Oh, hi, Carry,” she said. “You’re back. I hope you feel better soon.”

While in the mental ward this time, I decided I would not talk to the other patients. I would read books and stay in my room as much as possible.

After eating breakfast, I lay down until Carol came into my room. “Carry, you need to get a CT scan now,” she said.

Several hours later, after I had the CT scan, Dr. Walsh came into my room, writing in my folder and asking me several questions. “Where are you at right now?” he asked.

“In the hospital mental ward,” I said.

“Are you a man or a woman?” “A woman.”

“What time of day is it?” “Afternoon.”

He held up two fingers. “How many fingers do you see?” “Two.”

“What brought you to the ward?”

“I am depressed and suicidal because I have a condition that makes me have a foul body odor.

“Do you smell the odor right now?” “Yes.”

I informed Dr. Walsh that I live on the third floor of my apartment building, and because of my body odor, I always open all the windows to let the fresh air in. Flies are attracted to my foul scent, so my apartment has a lot of flies in it.

He immediately looked up at me. “You see flies?” he asked. I was fucked. “No, there are real flies,” I said.

He didn’t answer but wrote something in my folder. The more I talked to doctors, the more they seemed convinced that I had a mental illness. I did not have a mental illness. Flies were

attracted to my foul body odor in the same way they were attracted to the scent of rotten food or dog feces.

“I want to start you on some medicine to help you stop thinking you have a body odor,” Dr. Walsh said.

“No,” I said. “I do have a body odor, and I will never take any psychiatric medication.”

“I cannot help you if you do not let me,” he said. “You need to think about taking the medicine. If not for yourself, then for your daughter. I see here you have a daughter. The medicine will stop your delusions that are causing you to believe you have a body odor.”

I asked if he had ever met another patient with a mental illness who specifically stated that they had a body odor. “Is this even a sickness?” I asked. “Why would I say I had body odor if I’m delusional? Wouldn’t I say I see fifty people when there is just one person? I answered all your questions right, so I cannot be delusional.”

“You have a chemical imbalance that makes you think you have an odor coming from your body. I want you to take the medicine, and we can help you get some financial help.”

“What kind of financial help?” I asked.

“You can get a monthly check to help you care for yourself and your daughter,” he said. “A check for what?” I asked.

“Your mental disability,” he replied.

“I do not want to get a check every month; I want to work!” I growled. “You said you cannot care for yourself or your daughter,” he said.

“Because of the odor!” I yelled at him. “If you help me see a dermatologist, I can eliminate this odor. I will not sit at home waiting for a check every month. I have goals.” I told Dr. Walsh I did not want to live off the government, especially since I could work, and I wanted to work. I walked out of the room. I didn’t want to talk to him anymore.

The next morning, as I ate breakfast, instead of Dr. Walsh, a counselor came to see me. “Ms. Wilson, if you do not take the medicine Dr. Walsh is trying to start you on, you will not get better,” she said. “You are going around saying you see flies. None of the doctors can smell you. I am sitting beside you right now and do not smell you. Do you believe you are right and everyone else is wrong?” she asked.

“Yes, I am right, and they are wrong!” I told her.

She shook her head. “You must let the doctors help you.”

The following day, after I ate breakfast, I called my father and told him I was in the mental ward again. He said he was worried I had not come home the day before, and none of my neighbors could recall the last time they had seen me. My father wasted no time telling me, again, that I was wasting my life. “I hope you have a way to pay your bills,” he said. “Do you think I will pay your bills every month while you run around in hospitals acting crazy?” I did not want to, but I hung up on him. He was making me feel bad. I would tell him my minutes ran out on the phone, which was why the phone hung up.

I respect my father too much to disrespect him, but I needed him to help me fight against these doctors, and he was unwilling to do so. My father loved me, but he was from the old school. If the doctor said your face hurts because you are ugly, my father would believe whatever the doctor said. My father not having my back in this situation was scary for me. My father taught me to fight for what I believed in and use common sense in my everyday life, which was what I was doing. I smelled a foul odor coming from my body, and the doctors kept saying the odor was not there. My common sense told me they were wrong, so how could they help me?

Until I found a doctor who could smell me, I would keep fighting.

Later that morning, after group, I called Dr. Landry at her

clinic. I told her I was in the hospital's mental ward. I asked her to call Dr. Walsh and tell him I was not crazy. "Tell him you saw me before and about the book and the surgery," I pleaded with her.

"I will call him and tell him I have seen you as a patient," she said. Dr. Landry was my only hope.

Later that day, Dr. Walsh came in for the second of his three visits with me. I informed him that Dr. Landry would call him that day to tell him about the book and the sweat gland surgery and let him know I was not crazy.

"Okay, Ms. Wilson," he said. "Are you going to take the medicine today?" I said, "No!"

He asked me if I was feeling suicidal.

"I feel a little better now that I know Dr. Landry will call you," I said. "The medicine will stop you from having any feelings of suicide," he said. I walked away from him. I just wanted him to talk to Dr. Landry.

Later that afternoon, I called Dr. Landry. It was Friday, and Dr. Landry needed to call before the end of the day. I knew I would see Dr. Walsh for the last time between 4:00 and 5:00

p.m. I pleaded with her to call him before the day was over, and she said she had not called him yet but would do so at 4:30 p.m.

Dr. Walsh finally came to see me at 4:30 p.m. Before he could say anything, I asked him, "Did Dr. Landry call you yet?"

He said, "No, she has not called," and I immediately went and called her on the patient's phone.

"Dr. Landry, here is Dr. Walsh," I said. "Please talk to him." I handed the phone receiver to Dr. Walsh. I could not wait for him to get off the phone.

He talked to Dr. Landry for about ten minutes. Dr. Walsh hung up the phone and wrote something in my folder.

He said, "Let's go to your room and talk."

When we got to my room, he told me Dr. Landry told him I was harassing her. “She said she saw you in her clinic but did not smell an odor coming from you. Ms. Wilson, if you call Dr. Landry again, I will have no choice but to put you on phone restriction.” My mouth dropped open. I could not believe that Dr. Landry had abandoned me. “If you continue to say you have a foul odor coming from your body and refuse to take the medication, I will have no choice but to take you to court and get a court order from a judge. That will give the hospital ward the right to give you the medicine and keep you here until you get better.” I flopped down on the bed and sat there in disbelief. I could not believe this doctor could have the legal right to give me psychiatric medication for a chemical imbalance I did not have. I was terrified. (By what means would he give me the medication against my will, I thought)

Dr. Walsh left the room and said he would see me on Monday. Over the weekend, I thought about how Dr. Landry could have helped me from the first day I found the book. All she had to do was get the book and talk to the dermatologist. I hated her. Being in the mental ward was not helping me. I could not go to the doctor’s office or the library. I was terrified of staying in Chicago anymore because of the threat Dr. Walsh had made about forcing me to stay in the ward. If he felt that way, other doctors might as well. I had to think of a way out of the ward. I wanted to go back to the library and get a telephone number or address from the book *The Human Body Odor* so I could talk to or write to the book’s authors. I would tell Dr. Walsh on Monday that if he let me see a dermatologist and the dermatologist said I do not have a body odor; I would start taking medicine. The fact was, I was obsessed with seeing a dermatologist. I knew I had to get out of the hospital to help myself. When I found the book, I found hope for life. I kept telling myself I needed to see a dermatologist. I did not understand why the doctors could not

smell the odor, but I knew it was possible from the little information I had read in the book. I had been in the ward for four days and three nights.

On Monday, I woke up at 5:30 a.m. I ate breakfast, showered, and waited for Dr. Walsh to come. Like clockwork, at 7:30 a.m., Dr. Walsh came in.

“Hi, Ms. Wilson,” he said. “Did you get some rest this weekend?” “I feel much better,” I told him.

He said, “I want you to start on the medication today.” “Dr. Walsh,” I said, “I do not smell the odor anymore.” “Why? What happened?” he asked.

“I just don’t,” I said. “But I wanted to ask you if it would be possible for me to see a dermatologist. If the dermatologist says I do not have an odor, I will start taking medicine.”

“Why do you want to see a dermatologist if you say the odor is gone?” he asked. “I still want to see one, please, Dr. Walsh.”

“Okay,” he said. “I will try to get a dermatologist up here to see you today.” I lay in bed for the rest of the day. I even missed lunch.

At 4:00 p.m., Carol knocked on the door. “Carry, this is Dr. Baldwin. He is a dermatologist, and he needs to see you.” I was so excited. Finally, a dermatologist! I sat up on the bed.

“Hi, Carry. What is the problem?” Dr. Baldwin asked, looking at my chart.

I told him, “I have a condition that makes me have a foul body odor. I smell it, and other people I encounter smell it, but doctors keep saying there is no odor.”

“Doctors are not other people you encounter?” he asked.

“Of course they are,” I said. “But I have a body odor, and they are the ones whom I need to smell the odor.”

He cut me off as I told him about the cases in the book. “What do people say you smell like?” he asked.

“A dead rat or garbage,” I told him.

“Stand up for me and raise your arms,” he said. He smelled my armpits. He did not look down at my shirt, but he pulled the collar back and smelled down my shirt. He asked me, “What do you think you smell like?”

“Like something rotten and garbage.”

He asked, “Do you smell the odor right now?”

I said yes. He wrote something down in my chart and stood up. “Have a good day, Ms.

Wilson,” he said as he was leaving my room. I followed him; I hadn’t yet told him about the case report in the book.

As he left the ward, he handed my chart to Carol behind the front desk. Everything was happening so fast! I called Carol as she put my chart on the chart rack. Another nurse behind the front desk said, “Carry, go sit down.”

“I’m not talking to you,” I said.

She hollered, “Get away from the counter!”

I told her I was talking to Carol. She told me to stop bringing my ass back and forth to the hospital. I walked back to my room in tears. I told myself that when I cure my body odor, I would make a complaint against that nurse. She had no right to speak to me like that. I felt like a piece of garbage. I cried myself to sleep that night, and I did not eat dinner.

The next morning, Dr. Walsh came to see me earlier than usual. I was eating breakfast.

“Ms. Wilson, I need to speak to you in your room,” he said. I sat on my bed. “You saw the dermatologist yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“What did he say?”

I stopped breathing for the few seconds it took Dr. Walsh to open my folder and read. “Dr. Baldwin said he did not smell an odor coming from you.”

I did not overreact. I used all my strength to hold back the

tears. "I want you to start taking the medicine today," he said.

"I told you I do not smell the odor anymore, but I will take a prescription for the medicine home with me just in case the odor comes back," I said calmly.

"I need to see how you react to the medicine," he told me. I saw no way around it; I'd have to take the medicine. I wanted to get out of the hospital. I needed to get to the library and get the information out of the book too.

"Okay, I will take the medicine today," I agreed. "I will tell the nurse," Dr. Walsh said.

I sat there thinking. *What am I going to do?* I knew I couldn't swallow the pill, but I had to act like I was going to. I also knew that when patients take their medicine, they stand in one line, swallow the pill, and open their mouths wide so a nurse can look into their mouths. I didn't know what to do.

Later that day, the nurse said it was time for meds. The nurse handed me a cup of water in one hand and the pill in the other. I took a deep breath and placed the pill on my tongue. I gulped water, and as the water entered my mouth, I spit the pill into the cup. I opened my mouth wide so the nurse could look in. She nodded her head. I was scared she would look in my cup, but she didn't. I waited five minutes and then flushed the pill down the toilet.

The next morning, Dr. Walsh came earlier than usual again. I sat at the breakfast table.

He asked me how I felt.

"Okay," I said.

"How did the medicine make you feel?" he asked.

"Could we go to my room and talk?" I asked him. I did not even think about asking the nurse about the medicine's side effects, so I used the walk to my room to think about what I should say.

"The medication made my head hurt a little," I told him.

He said, “That is a normal side effect. Once your body gets used to the medicine, the headaches will stop. I will discharge you today.” I was happy!

Dr. Walsh referred me to Dr. Lauren Smith, a registered nurse (RN) and a psychiatrist. He thought I would like to see her because she could help me with my depression and hygiene issues. “She can see you tomorrow at 11:00 a.m.,” he said.

“Thank you so much,” I replied. The doctor also gave me a prescription for the crazy pills, a token, and all my belongings. I was discharged at 1:00 p.m. There was enough time for me to get to the library. Immediately after I got off the elevator on the hospital’s first floor, I threw the prescription for the crazy pills in a garbage can. I walked extra fast to get to the library. I asked the librarian for some notebook paper and a pen. I found the book in the same row where I found it the first time. I sat down and looked at the book’s last page; no address or telephone number existed. I looked at the first page again—nothing. I looked through the book, not reading but scoping for phone numbers or addresses that stood out.

I wrote out facts and symptoms that I could relate to. The library had other books on the condition of bromhidrosis. So, I wrote out different treatment options, including topical solutions, anticholinergic drugs, and surgery. I asked a guy sitting next to me what time it was.

“4:30 p.m.,” he said.

I was hungry and disappointed that I had not found an address or telephone number in any of the books I had read. Still, I had gathered enough information to show to the new doctor.

As I put the book back on the shelf, I thought that the new doctor needed to see this book.

She could read the case reports and understand that it was possible for me to have the odor and for some people to smell it

and others not to. I had to get this book. God would not be mad if I stole this book and brought it back after I showed it to the doctor.

I opened the book to the first page and tore the front cover off because that was where the sensor was. I put the book in my bag and went to the first floor. Two checkpoint systems were in front of both exits, but I was sure I had torn off the sensor on the book's front cover. I walked through the checkpoint, and the alarm went off. I stood there, looking like the checkpoint system had malfunctioned. A security guard came running from the back of the library. I turned and walked to the library's front desk and tried to look puzzled. The security guard asked me if I had another book from another library.

"Sometimes other books from other medical libraries set off the checkpoint system," he said.

I told him, "Yes, I do."

He asked, "Can I look at it?" I handed him the book, and he turned to the back cover. There it was, "The property of the University of Chicago Health and Science Library on Polk Street."

He looked at me and said, "This book belongs to this library."

I stood there, stuck. I couldn't move, hoping he would not call the cops and put me back in the mental hospital. Dr. Walsh would question why I had tried to steal the book if I thought I did not have the odor. He would know I had lied to him. I was terrified; Dr. Walsh would surely take me to court and have me admitted.

The security guard told me to leave the library and never return. As I ran out of the library, I did not feel bad about trying to steal the book; I felt terrible because I had gotten caught. I did not cry or feel bad as I rode the bus home. I had a lot of essential information to show Dr. Smith. She would understand me better.