

I am writing in support of my brother, Tom Gleason, who was a client of Oona Edmands at the Samaritan Counseling Center approximately three years ago. I understand that HIPAA laws prevent you from sharing information with me. I recognize that I only fully know one side of the story as it was told to me. I am aware that Tom has made many complaints that have gone unanswered...and I **know** the devastating impact this entire experience has had on his daily life. I am writing with the sole purpose of informing you of the inappropriate interactions Tom told me Ms. Edmands engaged in with him in the hopes that it never happens with another client of hers again.

When Tom started seeing Ms. Edmands, he had just moved to the Albany area after ending a long-term relationship. He was struggling with alcohol abuse, untreated depression and anxiety and his self-esteem was nearly non-existent.

In short, he was highly vulnerable.

Soon after beginning therapy, Ms. Edmands began sharing personal information and opinions that seem, to me, to be inappropriate in a therapist/client setting. These disclosures combined with the growing trust she and Tom were building caused him to feel that they were developing a true friendship that transcended the confines of a therapeutic setting. Instead of recognizing transference and taking appropriate action, Ms. Edmands continued to see Tom for therapy sessions and continued to share personal information.

After several months of therapy and becoming more and more convinced that there was a real relationship between them, Tom shared with Ms. Edmands that he had romantic feelings for her. Rather than explain transference and explore ways to deal with it, Ms. Edmands told Tom that if they got together they would “have a lot of fun for a week or so” and then she would be “done” with him. It is incomprehensible to me that a licensed, professional therapist would say something like this to **any** client, let alone one who was struggling with a difficult break-up and making meaningful connections with people.

Once the reality of his admission set in, Ms. Edmands said something to the effect of “this can’t happen again”. She shared with Tom that she had been inappropriately involved with a client in the past. This was the point at which everything started to fall apart and Tom was fairly quickly terminated as a client. He was extremely confused, very depressed and our family was very concerned about his well-being. We were so concerned that we called a mobile crisis unit to evaluate him and he was admitted for the first of several psychiatric care hospitalizations.

A couple of weeks after his release from the hospital, Tom was still struggling to understand the situation. He was so distraught that I arranged for a meeting at Samaritan with myself, Tom, Ms. Edmands and David Olsen. At this meeting, Tom presented Ms. Edmands and Mr. Olsen with an eloquent letter explaining his feelings. Ms. Edmands did not say much during the meeting, and after discussing

how Tom had grown to trust her and wanted to continue therapy with her it was decided that he could return to therapy sessions with her after attending rehab and a solid block of sobriety. Tom agreed but it was soon very apparent that it was not going to go according to plan.

Tom attended AA meetings regularly for quite some time and had decided that it was not the right program for him for a variety of reasons. He had discussed this at length with Ms. Edmands and before that meeting she was already very aware that he would not participate in a treatment plan that followed a twelve step model. She was also aware that he did not have the financial means to go to one of the very few non twelve step rehab facilities in operation at the time, none of which were within a reasonable distance from Albany.

Whether the desired outcome was to coerce him into AA, to set him up for failure so that he would never be accepted back as a client or something else entirely is irrelevant. Whatever the intent, the result has been catastrophic. After that meeting, Tom struggled with trying to comply by attending an outpatient rehab program he did not agree with and was seeing an addiction specialist he was not comfortable with just to hear time and time again that he was not keeping up his end of the bargain. He stopped attending the outpatient program. He ended the sessions with the addiction specialist. He sunk further and further into a depression that had our family worried beyond belief. He became extremely involved in the anti-AA movement to point that it and the situation with Samaritan have completely consumed him. He spends his days writing anti-AA blog posts, advocating for the anti-AA agenda on social media and writing letters of complaint that never seem to get a response. He has lost his job, lives on assistance and has been hospitalized at least twice in the last year for depression and suicidal thoughts. He does not like to be asked if he is actively drinking so my family and I avoid it for fear that he will shut down and not communicate with us. We are all incredibly worried about him and willing to support him in any way possible.

That is why I am writing you today. As I said in the first paragraph, this is the story as I understand it through speaking with Tom. I am not writing to make accusations or assign blame. I am writing to tell you that my brother feels as though he was treated unfairly. Whether his feelings are justified or not is not as important as the fact that he **has** these feelings and they are not being validated. I have seen him on a downward spiral since he was terminated as Ms. Edmands' client and it is terrifying. No one should seek out a therapist for help and leave in worse shape than he was when he arrived. No one crying out for help should be ignored. No one should have to worry about being honest in a therapy session for fear of how it could be used against him at some time in the future. Ms. Edmands told Tom that an inappropriate relationship with a client had happened before, Tom told me it happened to him, and I do not want to see it happen to anyone else.