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Former Psychiatric Patient Is Arrested in L.I. Assaults

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The man sneaked up from behind, locking his arms around the 11-year-old girl and rubbing himself against her back as she and her mother were entering a supermarket on Long Island about 2 p.m. Saturday, the police said. The girl screamed, and so did her mother and others around them, but the man ran before anyone could stop him.

Within the next hour, the police said, they heard about the man four more times, from women who said he had groped them in mall parking lots and in a convenience store. The attacks occurred within two miles of one another, along a commercial strip in Hicksville that is lined with stores and chain restaurants, the police said.

The police characterized the man's behavior as "bizarre." The father of the suspect, however, said the actions, though inexcusable, were a byproduct of mental illness and could have been avoided had his son not been released from the hospital too soon.

"He's not a vicious sexual predator," the father, Harvey L. Holmes Jr., said of his son, Harvey L. Holmes III, 42, who is facing charges including forcible touching, second-degree sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child.

Mr. Holmes, who his father said is deaf and had received a diagnosis of schizophrenia, was hospitalized at Nassau University Medical Center's psychiatric unit on Dec. 30 and released on Jan. 25, his father said. He said he had protested at the time that his son was not well enough to be out on the streets.

"He should have still been in a mental hospital, for sure," said the elder Mr. Holmes, an index editor at The New York Times. "What my son did is wrong, no question about it, but there's another side to this story. The system failed him."

Shelley Lotenberg, a spokeswoman for Nassau University Medical Center, declined to comment about Mr. Holmes, citing "patient privacy regulations."

Mr. Holmes, of Hicksville, was arrested at 3:30 p.m. on Saturday. Detective Lt. Kevin Smith of the Nassau County Police Department said that officers recognized his car from descriptions by the women who reported being attacked.

Mr. Holmes was under observation yesterday at Nassau University Medical Center, and by last night, he had not been arraigned, the police said.

They said that after he assaulted the girl at the entrance to the Super Stop & Shop market on West Old Country

Road, Mr. Holmes drove his white Buick to the Broadway Mall. There he reached out the car window and grabbed a woman's buttocks in the parking lot, they said. He fled after the woman threw a cup of coffee in his face, but resurfaced five minutes later, elsewhere in the lot, where he again groped a woman from inside his car, the police said.

The authorities described two other assaults: at the Delco Plaza parking lot, where, they said, Mr. Holmes tried to pull a woman into his car at about 2:30 p.m., and inside the 7-Eleven store on Jerusalem Avenue, where he improperly touched a clerk.

After the police recognized Mr. Holmes's car, they tried to pull it over. Mr. Holmes fled, but after a short chase he was arrested at the corner of South Broadway and Bloomingdale Avenue.

He had been arrested once before, in October, after being accused of fondling two women in the parking lot of a Target store in Westbury, Detective Smith said. He was released on bail then and was due back in court next Monday for a hearing in that case.

The elder Mr. Holmes said his son was hospitalized in 1989, when he showed acute signs of paranoia and delusion. Saturday was the first day he had left the house on his own since returning home from the hospital last month, the father said.

"He was so frightened, he spent weeks holed up in his room," he added.

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