Dear God Amen, I Can

My Art My Life My Schizophrenia

By Craig Geiser 2019

Preface

You are invited to travel with Craig Geiser through the story of his life—in his own words. You will be a witness to hallucinations that frightened him to the core, dogging him from high school graduation in 1978 until the early 2000s. With him, you will follow life’s usual progression from Craig’s first jobs to marriage and raising a child. It will amaze you that anyone with such a serious, lifelong illness as schizophrenia could ever survive the chaos to become a valued and loved contributor to his community. You will see how Craig harnessed his love of beauty to tame the beasts that invaded his mind. And, while contemplating the exquisite details of faces he drew, you will laugh and cry and dance with Craig in a contagious joy.

Only very recently has schizophrenia yielded to effective treatment with medication and therapy to the extent that a person has a fighting chance to avoid the triple threats of homelessness, incarceration in place of treatment, and suicide. For his generation, Craig is an outstanding example of courage and care that offers hope to anyone who struggles. Among the most serious challenges of mental illness is to discover one’s real identity. After all, the brain is what informs us of who we are—and mental illness is a disease of the brain.

In this account, Craig describes—in words and art—how difficult it was to untangle his personal identity from his illness. He has succeeded in doing this for
himself, and for us as well. Read on! The next time you hear about someone with a brain disease, you will not see a monster who threatens others. You will recognize a whole person, like Craig, who blesses those around him with great warmth, while triumphing over obstacles that could not destroy his soul.

Chapter 1. Mental illness takes over my life for the first time.

Schizophrenia introduced itself to me in 1978, while I was in the midst of preparing for graduation from high school. I worked part-time at a pizzeria and was taking a three-hour class in carpentry at a neighboring high school. After my morning class, I drove to my job where, while working, I got caught up in a discussion with a waitress and the manager. The words exchanged started a paranoid thought process, playing tricks with my mind and breaking down my grip on reality. I was let go early from work that day by the manager.

After this happened, schizophrenia started spinning its web and filling my brain with racing thoughts. I could not make sense of the new reality that overcame me. Soon, I entered the emergency ward, because my parents didn't know what to do with their son’s sudden inability to think. (Back then, this hospital didn't have a psych ward.) I do not remember how long my first hospitalization lasted—thoughts were coming in so fast that I could not make rhyme or reason out of them. I thought of my father as my protector, who watched over me during my stay there.

The reoccurring thoughts that kept following me from place to place at each hospital stay were of a massive guillotine on wheels. I believed It was being used to kill off people who knew me but were refusing to give up my hiding location. I was later
transferred to a big psychiatric hospital, where, to my surprise, the guillotine noise, coming from a huge blade being dropped over and over, seemed to dissipate into thin air.

The first medication doctors tried on me didn't work, so my parents requested them to try another type. When they started giving me Stelazine, it quieted most of the noise in my head. I kept rehearsing my thoughts over and over again, until things started to make sense and come together with reality. It took a while for me to reach the conclusion that taking the medication and being in the hospital really helped me. From a psychiatrist and psychologist, I found out that this was going to be a part of my life forever. It took a while to sink in that, to stay well, I would have to keep taking the medications. At first, I thought just the opposite, that being off all medications meant you were better. Not so.

In 1979, with my doctor’s permission, I discontinued taking medications and enrolled in a center to learn a new career for a job in the work place. During this time of studying, I lost touch with reality and reentered the schizophrenic thought zone. In 1980, I was picked up at the learning tech center by a family member who brought me back to the psychiatric hospital. [Hospital stays today are much shorter—often a few days. This is possible due in part to more effective medications. However, it is often far too short for stabilization, due to pressure from insurance companies to keep down costs.] I began taking medications again and stayed there for three months.
No. 1. 1982. I thought I would like to meet someone with a personality like hers one day.

I was hired by a nursing home, after completing classes to become a certified nurse's assistant, assigned to third shift. While on this shift, I started to sketch abstract faces with a simple black ink pen. I also started writing about my first experiences with schizophrenia and sharing these with co-workers for feedback. In 1983, at my county mental health group, I met Stuart, another guy living with schizophrenia. Both of us were writing about our mental illnesses and the impact they had on our lives.
No. 2. 1984. This piece illustrates the time when I began to mold abstract faces into fine art. An ink pen was my first paint brush that I glided across the canvas of 3x5 note cards. This was a breakthrough for me in learning how to relax.
No. 3. 1985. I found out later in life that Doug Klemm, a friend of mine in our current support group, was my admission counselor at Kendall School of Art, where I enrolled in a basic drawing class and created this life drawing of myself, using a mirror.

No. 4. 1986. In 1986, while working, I attended Kendall College of Art and Design. Even though I didn’t complete many classes, I learned a lot. There are few surviving color pieces from that era. This is my own interpretation of a piece of original art depicting a man of native American background.

This song is one of the best I’ve come across to explain what it is like to have schizophrenia.

THE ART OF NOISE-PARANOIMIA

[FEATURING MAX HEADROOM]

1986

Relax
You're quite safe here

Relax, ha! Hysteria, uncontrollable fear was setting in. The hospital wasn't allowed to tell anyone whether I was on the psychiatric ward. My mother-in-law asked if Craig was safe, to which staff replied “Yes, he’s safe.” [Note: under current HIPAA rules, it is even more difficult for family to communicate with hospital personnel about the condition of their loved one.]

Am I dreaming? No

Schizophrenia; I am walking through a dream state but awake.

Where am I? In bed?

Well, what am I doing?

Oh, talking to my self

No! On the hard tile floor. Hiding under the window next to the heating pipe register, so as not to be seen or heard talking to myself.

Look, I must have a star on my door

Or better still a door-a-doo-a door

Ah, swing doors up

O-o-o-okay doors, swing

No star here, just locked away. Who's able to go through the doors, as staff swing them open with a pass key? Too soon door shut, closed behind and tightly locked, because I check to see.

Paranoimia

Swing

We all gaze with disbelief.
Paranoimia

Swing

If only we could pass through!

Now I know I'm dreaming

Dreaming, dreaming

Dreaming, dreaming, dreaming

I repeat my thoughts because I get swamped with ideas too fast and powerful to let go.

Hmmm, how do I get to sleep?

Can't sleep a wink.

I know, I'll count

Those bars on the window

One, two, three, sleep

Distracting the mind is hard to accomplish. Dear God, Amen. I can.

Paranoimia, paranoimia

Paranoid schizophrenic.

Paranoimia, paranoimia

I know I am paranoid.

How do I get?

How do I get to sleep?

Please let me sleep

Noise is overwhelming. Muffle it out with pillow over my head. Please, I tell myself over and over, let me sleep.

Po-po-poetry, that'll work
Come sweet slumber

Enshroud me in thy purple cloak

Hmm. Doesn't even rhyme

Oh, to be able to recite poetry!

Is that my teas made?

My father loves tea.

Paranoimia paranoi

My father understands the paranoia in me.

I can't stand tea

Tea, tea, tea, tea....

It’s true I don't like tea. I set the tea aside for my father, as if he were coming to drink it.

Paranoimia, Paranoimia

I will carry paranoid thoughts with me the rest of my life.

Ahhh, Happy Harry's High Club

Marijuana High too much like schizophrenia.

How do I, how am I

Gonna get to sleep?

With a little help from medications and psychotherapy.

Trust me trust me....

You have to trust your doctors to work with you.

I started dating a gal on the A wing across from the B wing of the nursing home where I worked. We became engaged in 1987 and married the following year in
September of 1988. We moved south of town to live in a small bungalow near her parents. In 1990, my wife gave birth to our son. I switched careers, in the fall of 1987, to work as a maintenance man at a burger joint. We were juggling our jobs, while trying to raise our son. I worked third shift, daily passing the only car we had back to my wife. Partly due to our hectic lives, I didn't get hooked up with the services in the county to which I had moved, in order to continue on medication or receive the help I needed for my schizophrenia. I lost the job I had because my district manager pulled a fast one on me, changing the hours I worked, so we had to make a choice on whose job was more important mine or my wife's. Her job was saved because her insurance covered our family. I was able to get a job through a temp service.

During this pressured time, my wife told me she wanted a divorce. I was asked to move out to my parents’ house while they were down south for the winter. The schizophrenia showed its ugly face again in 1994. My older brother took over as my advocate, because I was between counties and didn't have any doctor. He found a doctor near where I lived, who said I was doing fine, and didn't believe I needed to be admitted into the hospital. My brother explained that I was sick and told the doctor that if he would not admit me to the hospital, he would soon face my brother in court.

The night before I left for the hospital, I experienced a gush of wind through the garage and into the house. A powerful voice said, "Sit Down!" I obeyed the order and sat down. This happened after I prayed for an angel or the Virgin Mary to be present to me to explain why I was having such terrifying schizophrenic experiences. What is happening in my life? Why do I have it? Then a shimmering light came through the sliding glass door, followed by a larger-than-life, beautiful voice, calling out, "Here Kitty
Kitty.” The cat jumped off my lap and went over to be petted. My doubts about God fell away. I knew that an all-powerful God was watching over me.

No. 5. 1990. I was trying to portray a person with a split or alter ego, which could appear at any time. I try not to let anger come out of me to mess up my marriage.

No. 6. 1991. The man’s face is tattooed, with feathers around his ear and an eye. They tell a story of his strength and stamina. Many people recognize the wisdom this man had to offer from days gone by.
No. 7. 1992. It never solves problems between a husband and wife when they both leave with broken and shattered feelings towards each other. The argument has to shift into a peace keeping mode between the two involved, in order to make their marriage work.

No. 8. 1993. This picture was made with the understanding that the Holy Spirit is always out there watching over us as we go through our daily lives. I try to remember to pray for our family, to strengthen us to get through the fast-paced world we enter every day.
No. 9. 1994. In the hospital, I used marker pens, supplied to me by my brother and sister-in-law, along with an art tablet that enabled me to create. Tall pines show the edge of the farmer’s plowed field at early sunrise as he begins the day.

No. 10 & 11. 1994. While on the psych ward, I created the next two pictures. The first picture shows flowers stretching out to reach the sunlight and morning dew. In the second picture, during late fall, all the leaves have fallen, a stark tree
stands against an orange sunset. I prayed to God for help to make my paintings beautiful for everyone to enjoy.

No. 12. 1994. In this picture, water is cascading over rocks as a father and son reel a fish into their row boat. Done with watered down acrylic paint, a new medium for me.

Just before entering the hospital, in February of 1994, I thought I was in contact with UFOs. It blew my mind when sightings—on March 8, 1994—were reported in my home newspaper. The UFO flew near the hospital, then west down South Shore Drive toward the lake, where I was living at the time. It was also picked up on the National Weather Service radar in a city to the north. Before these reports on the UFO, I was already aware of this phenomenon.
No. 13. 1994. During my hospitalization, I made a landscape of pine trees in Michigan using water color pencils—a hazy day with pine needles spread across the forest floor. These pines are thick throughout the rolling hills of northern Michigan.

No. 14. 1994. This picture reminds me of a croquet ball bouncing across the lawn, a game I used to play all the time—part of growing up in our small town.
I ended up moving in with my parents and became a stay-at-home father, raising my son on weekends. Writing and doing art became a way to escape the world into a safe haven.

I joined a group, called Dynamics in Living, which Stuart belonged to. It was put together by David Brownson, for and by the mentally ill (including David), meeting at a local church. Three of us were all hospitalized the same year. I met a gal while attending the group whom I later ended up dating.

In 1997, I got married, on the hottest day of the year. We moved into a 4-plex apartment building for mentally ill persons, called Ladder House. We had wonderful neighbors, who understood us well and were able to help us with mental health issues. Ladder House was there for the mentally ill when nobody else was available to help. This marriage was complicated from the start by the fact that we both had a mental illness. The two of us saw many counselors to help our marriage, to no avail. We could not reconcile enough to make the marriage work.
No. 15. 1994. In this picture, I used chalk pastels to create a woman. The funny thing is that today’s fashion matches my artwork, with all sorts of bright, fluorescent shades now being used by some women for their hair and make-up!
No. 16. 1996. A strong angel with a little book. My inspiration for this angel was taken from the pages of a Bible. The writing is backwards, because I flipped the painting using a computer to correct the angel's stance.

No. 17. 2000. This piece was my first to be part of a show, exhibited at the Holland Area Arts Council. I was even able to sell this Jesus painting. It felt good to have sold my first art piece.


When my second marriage ended in 2001, I moved into an apartment by myself. This is when I started having vivid, frightening hallucinations. In what follows, I indicate some of my difficulty distinguishing reality from delusion by using italics (and the historical present tense) to report my delusional thoughts. Where reality leaves off and delusions begin is intentionally imprecise.

The medication I was on began to fail me during a schizophrenic experience that unfolded into expanding hallucinations. It all began in and around my apartment, in September of 2001. Sitting out on my deck, I started reading the book that Stuart and I had written about schizophrenia, Living with Schizophrenia. That day, and the days that followed, my brain began going haywire. Children playing outside were loud. Panic set in. My thinking was that the children could understand who I was, and that my mind was vulnerable to attacks by their mocking thoughts about me.

When dusk becomes darkness, two men are sent to separate me from reality by killing me, one way or another. It is my belief that they have caused a poisonous gas leak
in my apartment. I can smell intense fumes becoming a thick fog. I sit on my couch staring at a picture of my son. I try not to let them enter my thought zone. Frozen with fear!

My breaking point comes when I light my cigarette. I can see the apartment blow up, along with half the buildings around. But wait, exhale, puff again, exhale. I am safe but how? Two men see all of this, with disbelief. I finish a few cigarettes and head for bed. They begin talking loudly and one starts whistling. I am still scared stiff.

All of a sudden, while I am lying there, a great, safe power takes control of my body, making it move, as if I were being asphyxiated and dying, to show the two men outside that I am positively dead.

The next evening, the whole process in my mind began again. I had learned from previous experiences not to watch television or listen to the radio. The two men return like clockwork. This time I get up the courage to leave my apartment, because I imagine that an Indian's spirit is guarding me. As I begin down the road, I stop a car whose headlights shine on my dark silhouette. It comes to a halt and the driver rolls down her window to hear what I have to say. I ask if she is all right. She says yes, with a dumbfounded look on her face. Good. And I walk away with my eyes searching cars for the two men around the complex.

My mind became flooded with thoughts. I broke down crying to God for help. Tears flowed down my face with overwhelming fear of the unknown.

The third day came. Thoughts were beginning to intensify and spiral out of control. I had my support group to attend later that day. Seven p.m. came around and we met to share about the past two weeks. I told everyone that I was going to check myself
into the hospital emergency room. They prayed for me. I drove there and checked in, 
telling the man at the front desk that I was schizophrenic and needed help. He told me to 
go to a window and sign in for admittance. I scribbled my name so that the people who 
were out to kill me wouldn't be able to find me. I tried not to have eye contact with 
anyone in the waiting room. They asked me in to take my vitals and confirm who I was 
for their records.

A guard escorted me to a secure area of the emergency ward. Another guard was 
posted outside my room. I was asked questions by a nurse with a twinkle in her eye, so 
she seemed that she could be trusted. She arranged for me to be admitted to the psych 
ward.

My parents didn't know that I had gone to admit myself to the hospital, only 
finding out later from Stuart. While there, I started drawing abstract faces, because I 
knew that it was one of the best ways to relax and occupy my time. The staff seemed to 
be interested in my art work, as well as my book on schizophrenia. I entered into a few 
discussion groups, was discharged after a short stay, and got a new medication 
adjustment to Geodon.

I took off to see Stuart. We went out for a cup of coffee. He remarked that I 
seemed to have a quicker response and a happier look than before the hospitalization. 
When I returned to my apartment, I knew everything would start again if I stayed there. 
So, I gathered up all the things I would need and drove over to my parents' condo to live 
for a while.
I met with my psychologist at the hospital on the second floor, opposite the psychiatric unit. He invited me in from the hall, where I was sitting, and asked if I'd like a cup of water or coffee. “Yes, water would be fine, thanks.”

During his absence, the heating register starts talking to me. When the doctor returned, I told him that I was hearing things coming out of the register. He replied that the buildings were old and made a lot of noises. After my comment to the doctor about the heat register, I hear another voice, a woman's. She says, "Thanks, Craig," and then the male voice disappears without a sound. I told my doctor that it felt as though I was having a heart attack, and that I wanted him to notify the emergency department that I was on my way to have my blood pressure taken. They checked me over in the E.R. and everything was O.K.

Back at the condo, I can hear a massive machine being hauled. Closer and closer by the minute. The guillotine is on its way to find me. I can hear heavy banging of the blade, as it kills people one by one on its way to locate me. At home, dinner was prepared and we all sat down for a home cooked meal. I saw, smelled, and tasted it but could only eat a little because I thought that the food might be poisoned.

Night came along with the darkness. The battle begins as I hear rounds of gunfire coming from people right outside my downstairs window. The smell of blood creeps into my bedroom. I cannot move with fear. The smell overpowers the air I am breathing, but I stay frozen in order to escape my fate with the guillotine. The great, safe power touches me with reassurance that I am protected by a stronger force, as she walks back and forth on my bed. She peers out the window. Her silent gaze reassures me that I am in this place and time for a reason.
I imagine somehow that I am now running the guillotine. Evil people finally receive their punishment by the blade, as the table of events switches in favor of the good. I am so tired from all the killing that I ask whether I killed them all, because I can't take it anymore. All the invisible people congratulate me for a job well done, with repeated tapping on my chest. Towards morning, there is beautiful singing that sounds like hundreds of angels in heaven honoring the mother Mary. The great safe power gives me a wonderful touch of electric current that jolts and twists my body into a peaceful, out of breath, ever-lasting feeling.

On another occasion, I am talking to Mary and looking at the sun in the sky, while sitting on my parents' deck at their condo. The sun moves around in the sky. It doesn’t let any clouds block my view as I talk to Mary. Her response feels like the sun, with a twinkling acknowledgement of what I have to say.

During this period, I had a dream that gave me a better understanding of knowledge. You can do anything, such as read a book or build a wall of bricks or stones. You may think it will be hard to build the wall. You may think it was a great accomplishment to build the wall. You may think that you could never be without the wall. It may serve a great purpose. You think it's beautiful. You may have thought it took forever to build the wall. You may think nobody else could have done better than you. You may think you could do another wall, just the same as you did this one. But, all in all, this wall can be built by anyone. This one was hard to do, but the second one will be easier; or it might not have been so smart to build one at all. You may ask yourself why you wasted time building the wall. It might even seem silly or stupid. The best thing in the world, or was it? You may cry or even be ashamed of it. You might
wonder why you feel anything at all about the wall. You might tear it down. You may later need this knowledge about the wall to recall the idea from your memory bank, or you might forget the whole thing all together.

This example of the wall can be related to anything you do in life. After this lesson, I went through all the emotions from start to finish. I was in awe, then in wonder. I laughed, I cried, I felt silly. I was ashamed, I was happy, then sad with disbelief, questioning, fearful, joyful, mad, angry, tired, and loving. Every emotion you can think of I experienced!

I had actually built a large retaining wall behind my house, and then discovered it was torn down, which led to my intense feeling of deeper understanding—about walls and other things.

Soon after this moment of insight, my parents went along with me to my psychiatrist's appointment. While in the waiting room, I was repeating 911 under my breath, over and over again, as fast as I could utter 911. I thought evil people were closing in on me. Some people in the waiting room were there to protect me.

Breakdown, for the second time in September, while in the psychiatrist's office.

I entered the hospital with my mother and father. I was asked to put on two hospital gowns and put on no-slip socks. I remember they gave me a plastic hospital bag for my clothes, and I switched the plastic one with the paper bag that was in the trash can, because the plastic one had the hospital logo on it. I didn't want to draw any attention to myself on my way to the psychiatric unit.

I am back again with this! They thought that Geodon had failed me and decided to put me on Haldol. I am looking for a way to escape this area from my bedroom. I
check the closet and cabinets, because I think that there are secret passages, such as hidden elevators, that lead out to safety. I check the barred windows to see if there is a fire escape stairwell on the other side.

The Haldol began to take effect. My eyes are playing horrible games with my vision. It is like viewing an old, silent motion picture, which seems to be jumping up and down, like a film projected on the screen at the theater. That's what my eyes are doing over and over again. Great, safe power catches me and lays me down on the hard tile floor, where my body takes over by shaking, trembling, and jumping jerks on the ground. It seems to last a long time. I feel my great, safe power protecting my body from any harm while I experience all this on the floor.

I was awakened on the floor by a psychiatrist and my psychologist. I asked them to help me stand up. I don't remember much conversation. By now I'd given up trusting the pills that they gave me. The next day, guess what, Haldol again. I took the pills with water, all went down. Wait a minute, one pill moved under my lip. I thought it was a sign not to swallow this one. So, when the nurse left the room, I spat it out into the sink that was in the room and washed it down the drain. I realized that this pill was the Haldol one.

Note: Haldol is a very powerful drug with terrible side-effects. Here are the side effects mentioned at a website:

- inability to move the eyes
- loss of balance control
- mask-like face
- muscle spasms, especially of the neck and back
• restlessness or need to keep moving (severe)
• shuffling walk
• stiffness of the arms and legs
• trembling and shaking of the fingers and hands
• twisting movements of the body
• weakness of the arms and legs.

No wonder I am among many patients who have resisted taking Haldol!

A little after this, doctors put me back on my old meds—a combination of both Zyprexa and Stelizine. Now they tell me what each med is before I take them, but I am still paranoid about them.

This time, January 2002, I drew many abstract faces with a black ink marker pen on computer paper. [See artwork on page 30.] While drawing faces, somehow, I am able to figure out that some patients are disappearing down the hall into a room that connects them to the next floor below the psychiatric unit. By passing through a door the patients gain strength and abilities in order to do battle with one another, to prove the master power that they unleash on each other.

A very old male patient keeps a close eye on me because he realizes that, while I draw faces, I am in fact entering into the floor below with my feet. They sink into the floor, allowing me to enter the battle with the masters, who can climb the walls and ceiling as fast and as nimbly as goats. But to their surprise, my abilities and brute strength are more than a match for the masters. My feet grow so sore that I have to give up—moving my feet to relieve the pain they endure. Doing this causes the others in the battle room to be released from my power. It's all they are able to do to muster up the
strength to leave the battle room and become ordinary patients again. The word passes from patient to patient about this new guy's super powers, able to take them all on at their own battle games.

Thinking the food was poisoned, I passed on most meals as the other patients were eating. I entered the dining room between meals and helped myself to graham crackers and Diet Sprite or chocolate milk. I lost a tremendous amount of weight during this hospitalization.

Let me explain to you the workings of two hospital phones. One phone was a pay phone for ordinary people. Another, white one, was like phones in any house, with a phone number stuck to it. It took several times of trying the phone number in order to reach a series of high pitched tones and screeches and then silence. I think this is a way to open the door nearby, but no luck. I begin to figure out that I had to let the tones and screeches end in silence, before I can talk into the phone with my brain waves. I sat down on the chair by the phone.

You couldn't see the phone from the nurses' station and no one bothered me while I was by myself with these phones. While sitting silent in waiting, I finally get help from great safe power—two invisible women. One tugs on the back of my chair, which gives me the idea to tilt it, raising the two front legs off the ground. Then, the second lady wants me to separate my legs, while still balancing in this position, in order to slip a four-wheeled dolly under the chair and give me a ride up and down and around on a track. Thus, I am en route to where we all step into a make-shift room where some invisible doctors work on me in secret. Even though I make this journey with the two ladies, it looks like I am still in one place, positioned in front of the phone. I can feel
them working on different parts of my body. I think they are fixing me so that I can become invisible to join them and learn from them. Then, I woke up (reentering reality from the psychotic state) and made my way down the hall to my room and bed.

The next day I gathered up my art supplies, positioned myself in the day room, and started drawing abstract faces of people all over the paper, front and back. I begin to think that I am chasing the devil out of one person, but then he jumps into another person's body while trying to escape from me. This went on as I drew the faces, one by one. It became intense, so I got up, gathered my papers and supplies and moved on to another room to be by myself to chase the devil.

I start taunting the devil by the way I am talking to him about Osama Bin Laden, telling him that we are going to find him and Bin Laden—“both of you”—to end this all. The great safe power is protecting me as I take on a big battle. I am drawing so fast that the faces are becoming only circles, with slashing lines through the circles on the front of the paper and on the back, because I am running out of paper. I don't want to get up, because I am sure to lose the devil and let him get away. My hand and arm have grown so tired with pain, from drawing so fast, that I finally give up the chase. He is now gone to parts unknown, like Osama Bin Laden.

The next hallucination was that the second floor moved and transported me from place to place in another dimension. On arrival, some of the masters are chosen from our ship's masters, because of their strong ability to do battle with tigers and lions four times the size of those on earth. Ordinary house cats have been enlarged to become huge beasts. I can hear all the fans cheering as the master gladiator-types do battle with their guns and brute strength. They can run at breathtaking speed while trying to catch and
kill the large cats. The master gladiator is picking up huge dead cats by the tail, swinging them around, and throwing them across the arena. The fans are cheering so loud that I can’t block it out of my mind.

I was sitting in a room by myself. I'll tell you what was going on in my mind during this event. I don’t understand, but I feel what the lions feel—the gun shots and all the running as the chase to death goes on. The lion’s death or the gladiator's death. I feel as though I am being swung over the gladiator’s head and then crash with several bounces on the ground. This is repeated over and over again, to the cheers of the crowd. If I move my feet at all, while the lion lies dead, it brings him back from the dead. A new battle, back to life again, raises more excitement in the crowd.

Battle after battle, the lions come back to life, with nonstop cheering by the large crowd of fans. I cannot take it anymore, so I get up and leave the room. What puzzles me most is how people can watch other humans do bloody battle and cheer for the entertainment. As I am leaving the room, all the lion beasts come back to life and start jumping over the railings into the audience where they begin killing fans. They are all screaming in great panic, as they race to their cars to flee the lions. I can hear car horns honking and see all the vehicle headlights as they rush out of the coliseum.

[This entire hallucination may have been related to sounds of cheering and cars moving at a high school football field near the hospital.]

Now, in the dining room sitting in a chair, I feel it begin to move at a fast rate of speed on a track, with the sound of my great safe power as she pushes me towards our spaceship, waiting for us to join them. On our way, I learn that by lowering my feet or raising them I can control the chair's speed. She taps my shoulder repeatedly so that I'll
lift or lower my feet, in order to keep the chair under control as she rides on the back of it, steering us to the safety of our spaceship.

During this time, I feel the whole hospital building rocking and swaying as we take off from our own dimension and earth, as I know it. At night, things still go on with the evil people trying to find me. I was so paranoid that I didn't dare get out of bed to use the bathroom. Instead, I would waken to a wet bed of urine.

The only prayer I could get out was, "Dear God, Amen." After the hospital stay, I went out for coffee with Stuart and told him about the prayer. I felt it wasn't a good enough prayer to God. But Stuart told me that it was an excellent prayer, because the Holy Spirit takes over and prays for me to God.

Later I was told that because I had been watching the news when the two airplanes hit the twin towers, it might have caused my schizophrenic break. I heard from a person at the National Alliance on Mental Illness that others with mental illness were also affected by seeing images of this terrorist act.
No. 18. 2001. I like the lines and colors in Mary’s face. The star of David informs us of her Jewish background. I sold four paintings of the Virgin Mary through an art gallery in Saugatuck, Michigan.

No. 19. 2001. Mary, with the sleeping baby Jesus wrapped in a blanket. I saw the Virgin Mary back in 1994, then decided to paint pictures depicting her in my abstract manner.

I asked for a pen and paper to do my sketches of abstract faces upon entering the “pic” unit on the psych ward. At the end of my stay, the art therapist collected all of my art. She asked if she could make copies because she understood what I had been going through. My mind had been racing, while I produced my art as fast as I could, filling the paper from top to bottom.
No. 20 & 21. 2001. These drawings are some of my racing thoughts—ones that I picked out from several pages and enlarged, so that you could see the fast pen strokes of my creations.

![Image of a woman holding a child with a peace symbol]

No. 22. 2001. The relaxing Mary is pregnant with the Christ child. I've never seen any art pictures with a pregnant Mary. My art was featured in a Saugatuck art gallery. This painting was purchased by the owner.

Nine-eleven reached a whole level of fear that I could not comprehend—a new form of terror that hit us all on that day.
No. 23. 2001. When 9/11 happened, I was watching the news and saw the planes hit the twin towers. This picture is supposed to remind us all that we should have peace within ourselves.

My older brother and sister-in-law set me up with a social worker who helped me over the years. Sterling counseled me on my first divorce, my mental illness, the new marriage and then my second divorce, in 2001.

No. 24. 2001. This is Sterling’s train painting that I gave to his wife, in remembrance of the trains he used to have set up in his office when I’d come for
therapy. Sterling loved to discuss my artwork with me and encouraged me to keep on going with my art.

Over time, I became stable, experiencing remission from my psychotic symptoms. This brought me light, calmness, and the ability to focus on creating art.

I participated in an art show, "Focusing on Ability," which showcases artists with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities. It was part of a traveling art exhibit throughout Michigan, sponsored by Ottawa County Mental Health, in October 2003.

No. 25. 2003. A friend's parents wanted me to do an abstract painting of them. This was one of the first pieces I did with any color in it. I thought the bright colors brought out their love for each other, along with their two hearts joined together in a lasting marriage.

No. 26. 2004. The cross and peace sign are there for Mary to remember Jesus. Surrounded by a golden halo, she seems very proud, dressed in her hat and gown.
In 2005, the director at the Holland Drop-In Center, a non-profit organization for the mentally ill and run by them, asked if I would like to become a board member. I accepted and served as board member for ten years.

A painting of a puzzle face, and my explanation of schizophrenia, both were printed in Dr. David G Myers' textbook *Psychology 10th Edition in Modules*; multiple editions sold worldwide.

No. 27. 2005. *This primal creature shows its strength and power with the tongue hanging from its mouth. The colors are meant to warn people off. Quite a few people have said that my work reminds them of Picasso's art.*

No. 28. 2006. *I included puzzle pieces, because they represent the complexity of schizophrenia—putting together all the pieces and hoping you don't end up with any missing pieces at the end. I explored different combinations of colors in order to bring out the feelings and personality for each person I created.*
Chapter 3. I answer questions from students in a psychology class, to whom I spoke over the last few decades.

How did you start hearing voices and what was the cause?

*The voices were there but the major sound was the guillotine's heavy blade being dropped over and over because my friends would not give me up. I was taken off my medicine for approximately one year while I attended the rehabilitation center.*

It has been found that certain behavior traits develop prior to a relapse. Did you realize when you were relapsing?

*Stress seems to play a major role and periods of insomnia, sometimes lasting for more than three days. During my relapse I could tell I needed help so I drove myself to the hospital.*

How did you meet your first wife? What was her reaction to your illness?

*I met her at a nursing home, we both worked there together. I had the hospital files and notes from both of my hospital stays. I gave them to her so she could understand my situation. I gave her the notes while we were dating so I could try to help her understand what I was going through.*

Where did you begin doing your art work?

*Most of my art was created at the nursing home on third shift during down time and between call lights. I also attended Kendall School of Design during my days off.*
Didn't it seem strange that people were dying right outside your hospital door?

As fast as my thoughts were coming to me, my brain was on overload and making up unbelievable ideas, but it was hard to dismiss them.

Did you ever want to help them?

I couldn't figure out in the beginning how to stop all the killings. Later in 2001 and 2002, I thought I was being helped by angels by taking over the guillotine, like good conquering evil.

When you look back on your hallucinations, do they seem as though they really occurred or do they seem like bad dreams?

It’s still hard to dismiss them as hallucinations. They seem so real at the time; still today it’s like I was awake but walking through a dream.

Is there a difference between your drawings when you are in a state of confusion and when you are not?

There certainly is a difference. In those times of confusion my art became fast circular motions of tiny faces repeated over and over again. Then I prayed to do more color pictures. This happened while I was on the psych ward back in 1994.

Do you still think about the “Art of Noise song in "Paranoimia," and does it hold the same meaning, if any, for you today?
That song meant a lot to me then and still does. I have a connection to music because it hits home on what it is like to be a paranoid schizophrenic. How it feels to be locked up in a room with a mat on the ground and bars on the windows. It was a wake-up call to understanding myself better.

Because you are conscious of the fact that you have schizophrenia are you aware when you're having schizophrenic episodes and, if so, how often do you have them?

At times, I'm aware of it coming back to the paranoid thought zone. I consider myself very blessed to only have been hospitalized five times.

Do you have any family members who have or have had schizophrenia?

My social worker Sterling Osmun let me know that he thought my mother had a slight case of schizophrenia. She managed to get by without any hospitalizations.

Do you think it's worth it to take the medicine even with the side effects?

Yes, I think it is beneficial to take medications along with psychotherapy. I've gotten used to the tremors but I hate the weight gain I've had to deal with over the years.

What type of therapy are you in currently?

The “therapy” for me right now is writing, drawing, and working on getting this second book published to help others have a better understanding of schizophrenia and of the person who lives with it.
When you were in the hospital with delusions and hallucinations, did any of the words of your family and the doctors get through to you?

*I understood that I was having problems but my family had a hard time convincing me that I was losing my grip on reality. I proceeded to the hospital on my own in 1994, because I thought I was keeping my family members safe from all the killings. In 2001, my psychiatrist and psychologist were new and had never experienced me in a psychotic state before. They finally put me on a combination of new meds which brought me back to reality.*

Did the hallucinations and delusions come on all of a sudden?

*The hallucinations and delusions did seem to come on all of a sudden from my point of view. The voices began bombarding me from all directions. I knew deep inside there was a great disbelief and an onset of confusion about whether I could handle by myself.*

Do you think the media (including movies and television) had much effect on the subject matter of your hallucinations and delusions?

*I remember that "All in the Family" T.V. program was giving me mixed messages while in the hospital back in 1978. I felt like I was part of the program, playing cards and conversing with Archie and his buddies. In 2001, during another hospitalization, I saw the movie "The Fallen," starring Denzel Washington and John Goodman. It had me believing that I was chasing the devil from person to person, as the movie depicts. Each person I touched was represented by a tiny face that I drew over and over again, as fast as I could, from top to bottom and front to back of the paper until I got tired.*
been able to catch the devil, I would have stopped drawing the faces. I became so tired, however, that I had to give up the chase! [See page 30.]

Is the illness totally controlled by your medications?

The medications do the major part of keeping my brain in check and in reality. Along with psychotherapy, both aspects allow me to have a balanced life.

Did people treat you differently after they found out you had schizophrenia?

Some people might think you're crazy or you would harm someone but all in all most people I come across treat me just fine.

Where did you meet your second wife?

We met at a support group called "Dynamics in Living" that met at a local church in town. It was run by and for mentally ill persons. With help from my future wife’s mother, we started "Dynamic Nights" a recreation group. It met at our church of worship. Church and group members played volleyball together. Our problems as a couple became too overwhelming for us, so much so that we ended up getting a divorce in 2001.

What happened to your son's life? I can tell you two were really close as father and son.

He's doing fine. He graduated high school and also earned bachelor’s degree in college. After graduation, he had an internship at a film studio in Chicago. He would like to be a writer/director at a film studio, but he cannot find film work in Michigan. In the
meantime, he lives with friends and works night shifts at a hotel as the night time auditor at the front desk.

This isn't a question that people like to talk about, but has suicide ever affected you or anyone you know in relation to mental illness?

I've known some people who have had trouble with suicidal thoughts, believing it to be their only option. Like others, I feel bad when it happens. When a friend of mine died recently of suicide, his longtime buddy wrote to address questions like: could I have done something to prevent his death? “One thing I can say with lazar clarity is that no one on this planet could stop John from anything he had set his mind to. So, when our grief releases us, we must all be at peace with John and ourselves.”

Chapter 4. Psychology students respond to presentations about my art, my book, and my illness.

1. Your drive to get back to normal life was astounding and I think you are truly an amazing person not in spite of your disease but because of it. You knew that the old you was still buried deep down inside and instead of giving up you kept on searching for it.

   I was diagnosed with an auto-immune disorder called Crohn's Disease. Even though our diseases are completely different, it was still very encouraging to hear from someone else who is always working to live the best life they can despite the obstacles in the way.
No. 29. 2006. I think some of my abstract faces have a little of me inside each of them. This hat, for example, reminds me of one I once wore for Halloween. The red and black colors together look like a checkerboard game.

No. 30. 2006. These two figures were inspired by the times of King Arthur, during the days of jousting and chivalry. The bold colors remind me of the strength they needed to co-exist with one another.

2. I cannot imagine what it would be living in a world where reality and imagination collide into a new reality.

   Studies show that stress seems to play a huge part in someone predisposed to become schizophrenic and seems to aid in a person developing the disorder.

3. You always appreciated it when someone walking past your room would simply say ‘hi’ or stop in just to talk. This is probably what struck me the most and can be an important lesson for all of us to learn. We need to give more and go above to give extra.
As you have explained, it makes a great difference and has an impact on people. As I hope to one day have a career that helps and works with people, I find it important to remember just to simply say “hi” or ask how someone is doing.

No. 31. 2006. *This picture was inspired by the legendary Bob Marley, with the figure donning his dreadlocks and the sign of peace, with which he imbued his music. The red stamps are chops of my first and last name in Chinese. My parents brought back my first chop with “Craig” inscribed on it; later my sister-in-law brought back a second chop with my last name from Hong Kong.*

4. It doesn't matter if you are tall, short, black, white, young, old, healthy, sick, or have a disorder or not, these social support systems are needed by everyone. They are universal.
When you explained living with schizophrenia like walking through a dream with the exception that everything was real, it put things in perspective for me. This comparison gives me something that I can relate to.

No. 32. 2006. Janis Joplin and Big Brother & The Holding Company were one of my favorite bands during the 60's and 70's. If you get a chance, listen to "Me & Bobby McGee," "Bye Bye Baby," and "Piece of My Heart." Then you too will hear the soulful sound of Janis Joplin.

5. Insightful and engaging. Your story is so full of twists, turns, peaks and valleys that I could have listened and asked questions for hours. You have demonstrated how people can not only survive but thrive when facing the challenges that accompany that diagnosis.
Having such a major wrench thrown into your idea of a life's planned path could cause many people to just withdraw from society, but it sounds like your faith has kept you optimistic and successful. It is easy to start to question God or his plan for your life [when life situations are not ideal]. You have shown that it is possible to push through difficult situations and that the Lord doesn't leave you. I wondered if you have ever viewed any hallucinations as a sign or message from God.

No. 33. 2006. The eyes are the focal point of many of my paintings. I typically start with them and define the face of the character from there. This one is a real eye opener.

No. 34. 2006. I like to think her hair is how she would wear it to a ballroom dance in a castle. She is probably looking for her prince in shining armor.
6. [The greatest misconception is that] those with the disorder cannot live lives that most people would deem as "normal." By a normal life, I mean a career, spouse, children, and social network.

No. 35. 2006. This character has pink, wavy, hair held together with a product like "Dippity Do," which despite all odds is still sold today.

7. Before meeting you I had somewhat of a skewed view of schizophrenia. [Previously] I assumed that when someone was diagnosed with schizophrenia they changed into a completely different person. I figured that once diagnosed, that person was changed and could never return to their "normal" self.

You were still Craig no matter what happened. It did not change who you were. It does not make the person who they are. Outside of class, I would have had no idea that you even had schizophrenia.
[You are] able to lead such a normal life. You had the same ups and downs as anyone else...marriage...divorce. And you are still very close to your son.

You are the same Craig you were before the diagnoses, and I thank you for helping me understand that.

No. 36. 2007. This picture depicts a man who is a participant in a masquerade ball at the queen’s palace. Most of my artwork is made with opaque paint markers, like this piece.

No. 37. 2007. This man has colors and shades of a peaceful butterfly. It makes me think of the male species doing a mating dance to attract a female with its bold colors. My cousin was once told, by a psychic, that every time she has a butterfly around her it was a sign that her brother was nearby.
8. One of the things you wrote that struck me most was how real everything was to you that you experienced. [Things that have] helped you cope with schizophrenia such as taking medications regularly and having a good support system. I was also struck by your description of the advanced directive and being able to use this when you aren't well. It sounds like people really are working as part of a team to help take care of you and that you're the center of this team, seeking good health.

No. 38. 2007. The woman is asking for a divorce, while the man can't handle the idea of going on without her by his side. With all the stress of the relationship breaking up, the schizophrenia reappears and derails the man, sending him back into the hospital. This is more reality than fiction.

No. 39. 2007. This is a picture of one of my good friend's dog Zoe. She has her head cocked to one side as if she knows what you're experiencing. When you're paranoid you think people around you are talking about you. Pets make good companions for those with mental illnesses.
9. [Speaking with you] helped me to see that you are a normal man who has sadly been afflicted with schizophrenia. I hope that someday in the near future there will be a push for greater awareness of schizophrenia.

[It is important to see] how you can turn this negative into a positive. You have obviously made your negative situation into a positive one by creating some beautiful artwork and writing a book!

No. 40. 2007. This cat picture was done out of love for my mother, who adored cats. It was etched into her grave stone for all to see. One of my mother's friends told me she appreciated how I decorated her head stone. I made her favorite cat "Kitty Witty" come to life.

No. 41. 2008. A picture of an abstract face of Jesus and the two thieves reminds me that he died for our sins. The purple in the painting looks like a somber sunset
on Calvary. I use different symbols to keep you thinking about what the artwork is trying to portray and open it up for discussion.

10. I respect your decision to have a child in spite of your own struggles. The open relationship that you have maintained with your son and the important role that you have taken in raising him are admirable.

No. 42. 2008. The brown, yellow, and orange combination seems to work so well, contrasting perfectly with the blue eyes. The eyes look as if they can see right through you, that they know everything about you. How could someone tell that you have paranoid thoughts?

No. 43. 2008. The woman's face in the center of this picture is illuminated by her golden hair, in the shape of a sunburst. She looks like a model who could walk down a fashion runway in any big metropolitan city around the world.
One of my close family members was recently diagnosed with schizophrenia and although I am a psychology major I feel as though I know very little about this disorder and what it is like to live with it. So, as I am trying to understand my family member's disorder, your presentation and book have helped a lot. I know that everyone's story is different but you have helped me understand my family member better and hopefully I will be able to help her because of that. Also, within my family it seems that everyone treats this family member's disorder as taboo; not everybody knows. She feels embarrassed and nobody talks about it.

No. 44. 2008. *This character is from Jamaica, sporting a knit hat that holds his dreadlocks. He seems like a man who has no problems or worries on his tropical island.*

No. 45. 2008. *A man in Africa, whose ceremonial face paint shows the strength of the tribesman. The cross makes me think of the suffering he might go through for his next meal, or maybe even war paint for the next battle.*
12. I hope you continue to be guided through life the way that you are. You also seem to have life figured out. So many people in this world attempt to have a small amount of “peace of mind” like you do. You are comfortable with yourself, with life, and with God. Keep moving on that path. Not only are you smart, you are extremely talented. Continue to use your gifts to help others and give more light on the subject of schizophrenia.

Like Gandhi said, “You are the difference that you want to see in the world.”

You're changing the world and changing labels and stereotypes, one testimony and one book at a time.

No. 46. 2008. This lady makes me think of women who go to the Catholic church early in the mornings to pray with their rosary beads before mass begins. The ear rings are used in many of my depictions of people.
If you look at the right eye of this person (in the cube), and stare at it long enough, then you will notice that it will flip back and forth around the eye, depending on how you visualize the space.

I was greatly impacted when you said that if you could take back your schizophrenia you would not do it.

The last time I heard you talk I could not hold back my tears. These tears were not of sadness but tears of hope. You give me so much hope that my mother, and all people with mental illness, can get the help they need. You give me hope that when life gives you challenging situations, you can be heroic and turn those situations into something so great! In addition to giving me hope, you have made me feel like my mother and I are not alone. I cannot say thank you enough for that.

This portrait is of Rocky, a staff member in the psych ward. He blended in by wearing a tee shirt with Camel Shorts cigarettes tucked into the
pocket, faded blue jean, and tennis shoes. He was a colorful, happy-go-lucky guy that I felt safe with during the first few years of schizophrenia. He was a big influence in my career choice to become a nurse’s assistant in a nursing home.

No. 49. 2008. "Don't drink and drive. I've got my eyes on you!" When I went to the bars at night, I eventually noticed that you'd see the same faces on certain hours and on certain days. This got me thinking that there must be something better than this, better than alcohol.

14. The extreme detail in how your mind was able to take reality and warp in with different things from other areas to create this altered reality was so interesting to read about, I truly enjoyed reading about all the different realities and illusions that your mind had created.
No. 50. 2008. This guy makes me wonder if he could have been someone who set out on a journey and ended up at Woodstock. I grew up listening to all those bands and now I have a collection of vinyl albums that inspire me while doing art.

No. 51. 2008. The guy in the picture looks like my father, a tall, thin, and quiet man who had a smart answer for all your questions. He worked for "Ma" Bell for 38 years, from telephone pole climbing to eventually working with early computers that set up communications between each other.

15. I feel that schizophrenia can be seen as a God-given lifestyle that allows you to think creatively and uniquely. Each of us is made wonderfully by Him in a unique way. We are all different and we all think differently.

No. 52. 2008. "Welcome to my world, cousin John" is a portrait in remembrance of him and how much he liked my art. I mailed it to Florida, where his sister has it hanging in her house. I know John's spirit enjoys what I have created.

No. 53. 2009. I could see this man being the captain of a spaceship, traveling from galaxy to galaxy. One thing I hate on earth is all the wars and rumors of
wars, and I like the saying "Beam me up Scotty," because there's no intelligence down here.

16. I was amazed at the positive attitude you were able to maintain. Not only did you never give up, but you also set high expectations for yourself. You did not take your diagnosis as something life ending, rather something life changing and something that made you stronger.

No. 54. 2009. My favorite guitar player of all time is Jimmy Hendrix. His rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner is the best music I have ever heard.

No. 55. 2009. Whoopi Goldberg is in the classic movie "Ghost." "Sister Act" brought back memories of days gone by, when I used to go to the Catholic school as a kid.
17. [Your words remind me], I'm still me, still who God created me to be. You have shown that this can happen to anyone and at any time in his or her life. The Schizophrenia just seemed to creep in without any warning signs.

No. 56. 2009. *The lady pictured here has excellent shading across the face, and beautiful black eyes. I received the best response ever from a friend at the Drop-In Center, who happens to be black. She enjoyed all the paintings I made that included black culture. I went home and returned with many copies for her, she was very grateful.*

No. 57. 2009. *The great Michael Jackson. I always thought if I had a chance to meet him he just might like my style of art work. I love the way his hair turned out—it brightens up and makes the whole picture glow. "This Is It" was going to be Michael’s last concert. While it ended up being a posthumous video of his last*
attempt at stardom, I enjoyed it nonetheless as it reminded me of my childhood, watching him on all those variety shows and music videos.

18. [Your story] helped me for the first time connect the dots and understand some of the thought patterns associated with schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia is truly a journey containing ebbs and flows. A person cannot be characterized by a particular point in life, but rather by cumulative growth over a lifetime. I also came to recognize that schizophrenia is more common than I had previously thought.

No. 58. 2010. All of my pictures with these colors remind me of the psychedelic age of the 60's and 70's.

No. 59. 2010. These pictures were chosen from a variety of my art books and assembled into a queen size quilt. The quilt was exhibited in Grand Rapids, Michigan for Art Prize 2011. The flowers around the quilt look like they're from the early 70's.
19. I loved the prayer you recited for us during class, "Dear God, Amen." Then you explained that the Holy Spirit takes over from there. I think this is so applicable for anyone, under any circumstances, when the words just won't come for prayer. I know I've been through that many times, where I know I want to pray, but the words just won't come out, or I don't know what to pray. I could really sense how the Lord has been your strength through the hard times. It is very encouraging to see that strength in you, because it reaffirms the love and caring that God has for all his children.

No. 60. 2010. This wooden mask looks as if it might have been worn by African natives during ceremonial dances. Sometimes you feel like wearing a mask to hide yourself from people, because the real "you" is a paranoid schizophrenic. You could get lost and go into your own private little world of peace and quiet. 2001 and 2002 was the hardest period for me to shut down the noise and calm down racing thoughts.
No. 61. 2010. I like using simple shapes, such as triangles, squares, and circles to bring out the essence of children's choice in art, along with their typical use of color. Jack, a man at one of my presentations (who was there to talk about his poetry), asked this question of me, “Most people usually put a brown sock with a brown sock, or a black sock with a black sock, but you seem to be putting on a green sock with a red or orange sock and somehow it just works for you, how is this?” I had to think for a minute, then I replied, "Screw the rules, and do what feels right.”

20. My mother had an aunt with schizophrenia, and the image I had of her was of a nonfunctional, delusional woman. You have shattered that image. I now see that my great aunt could have been a remarkable person, like you, a person with a lot of wisdom to share.

No. 62. 2010. This "double faced" lady is quite striking to look at with pink highlights in her hair and face, which make it glow brightly. The black color
meshes together in a delightful way, making the picture mirror one side of her face to the other.

No. 63. 2010. I call this one "Champagne Bubbles," as the couple slow dances across the ballroom floor. They kiss goodbye until they meet again. This painting was at the Holland Area Arts Council, in a show called Prisms of Hope, with five local artists.

21. Our professor said you felt that your schizophrenia has made you a deeper, more profound person, because of all the suffering and confusion inherent in the mental illness. She also said that you see more beauty in the world than the average person. I wish I could see the beauty that you see, to be able to see the proverbial cloud's silver lining.

No. 64. 2010. She is waiting back stage for the next curtain call for a Broadway show. It reminds me of when I used to go see my aunt Jo and cousin John doing theater shows in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
No. 65. 2011. I have a John Lennon 24kt plated LP 25th anniversary of Imagine.

Peace and love were all around during the Vietnam War. Protests on college campuses made everyone aware of the difference between what was reported on the news and what was really going on over there.

22. I want you to know that I think what you do is to perform little miracles every day. Before I met you, I was afraid of schizophrenia and the way it can make people act, but you have shown me that there is no reason for fear. You are making more of an impact on the world than I could ever dream of. I can see that you have a heart as big as an ocean, and you want to use that passion to empower others—especially others in the mental health community. But your passion is not limited specifically to that population. I honestly believe that you are making the world a better place to live each time you tell your story, and I can bet that you are a hero to more than one person on this earth.
No. 66. 2011. The lazy days of summer, fishing in Lake Cadillac, trying to catch the big one. My son and a friend of mine camped there year after year. We fished and caught our limit of pan fish to clean and eat, with enough to bring home.

No. 67. 2011. This is one of my friend Stuart's favorite paintings. He likes to look up on the computer the Hubble telescope’s views of planets, moons, and stars, like the earrings in this picture.

23. You described [the drawings] as giving you “an opportunity to leave the real world and go into a fantasy and make believe—in a constructive fashion.” They give even more insight into your mind that goes beyond written text. I found myself dissecting each of your works and looking for themes, patterns, or anomalies. Some of the drawings I found beautiful and others haunting, and still others beautifully haunting. The complexity of the human mind is so incredible and I think you have a unique gift to show this complexity.

I also take a liking to the fact that your drawings are like an adventure. It seems like life to me.
No. 68. 2011. "Napoleon Dynamite," with a puzzling look on his face. This image makes me laugh, thinking of the titular character feeding the lama lasagna and the time uncle Rico hit him in the eye with a frozen steak as he road by on his bicycle. Good times.

No. 69. 2011. Downhill skiing in the winter was what we did at Carousel Mountain. We used our paper route money to pay for lessons and ski passes for the day. This guy is ready to go down one of the steepest hills, called "Pale Face," which I have never attempted to do.

24. When I was looking at your artwork I was struck by the color and organic lines that you used. All the drawings had a sense of happiness to them that really made them a joy to look at. Your art expresses the happiness that you have in your life and that is a truly beautiful thing.
No. 70. 2011. In this house painting, the eyes are the windows to the soul. In my house, I usually keep the curtains pulled because of my paranoia. I have a support group that uses a book called "A Balanced Life" (from the Karla Smith Foundation), which meets at a local Catholic church. In our group, we have families and friends of people who struggle with mental illnesses. Some members also have a mental illness.

No. 71. 2012. I loved everything that princes Diana stood for. She had an impeccable personality and abundant kindness. It was sad, in 1997, to hear that she was not with us anymore. I hope this painting captures her likeness that we all loved.

25. Each drawing has its own story and expresses so much with so little. There are some drawings that are very simple, yet some are so vividly detailed that you can't help but just stare at them and let your eye wander around the image.
No. 72. 2012. Jack Nicholson's portrait, from the days of the movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." The psych ward and nurse Ratchet made him go crazy.

I thought the colors captured his paranoid look.

No. 73. 2013. The blue hue on this lady’s face gives shape to the complexion of her high cheek bones. Blue lines follow the contour of her hair. The yellow and brown colors compliment her long neck and her petite stature.

26. I admire your creativity and your drawings' detail, especially the focus on the eyes. I have never seen so many different interpretations of an eye. They are all unique! Our literal sense of sight, as well as our perception, is a huge part of how we see life, ourselves, and others. The asymmetry and disconnect of the eyes on your drawings definitely demonstrated how schizophrenia has affected your perceptions. I also think they convey so much information such as mood, emotion, and light by looking into someone's eyes. If you were someone else looking into your eyes, what would you have
seen? How did faith affect your perceptions? Have you felt that schizophrenia has affected not only your perceptions, but somehow your sight as well? I found [the drawings] all very interesting. It was difficult to stop looking at them. I kept trying to relate one to another because they all seem to focus primarily on the eyes. Creating art can be a therapeutic way to express both the highs and the lows throughout your life.

No. 74. 2013. Jesus is dragging a huge, heavy cross while wearing a crown of thorns. The pain he endures shows signs on his face, like his eyes wincing, as his lips cringe and quiver.

No. 75. 2013. Jesus, in deep thought about what is happening to him. He is being mocked with the crown of thorns and called king of the Jews. In the psych ward, I was so scared and frightened that I could hardly pray—the only prayer that I could get out was, "Dear God, Amen."
27. Hearing from you what it means to live with schizophrenia was refreshing, emotional, thought provoking, and it touched my heart all at the same time.

While paging through your drawings in your book, I was struck with a sense of familiarity. After searching through old pictures on my computer, I discovered that I first saw your art work back in the fall of 2011, when I was in downtown Grand Rapids during Art Prize. I remember I was initially drawn to your tapestry, because of the bright colors you used when drawing the faces. However, after looking more closely at your drawings (both at Art Prize and in your book), I decided the reason that I like them so much is because of the complexity of each face and the way that the eyes of each person convey some sort of emotion.

Your artwork is a much-needed reminder of what it means to be human. It is a reminder that no two people are ever the same, and each individual is complex in his or her own right. Furthermore, they are a reminder that while we are all different and complex, there is one thing that we all have in common—the way that each one of us experiences, and is vulnerable to, emotion. Sometimes, in the midst of the chaos of everyday life, I forget that. Thank you again for this reminder and for sharing your story.
No. 76. 2013. This character looks like a small, wise old man from India. I bet he could tell you a lot of amazing stories that he has experienced in his lifetime!

No. 77. 2013. I gave up smoking, but my addiction keeps wanting me to start up again. I think giving up has helped stop some of the paranoia and getting rid of caffeine might also have helped.

28. It hit me that you have been dealing with this for so many years now, that you’re still dealing with it, and most likely you’re going to be dealing with it the rest of your life. It’s difficult for me to comprehend the gravity of this situation because I’m not in your shoes. So, I do truly find you strong and courageous. I am inspired by your courage and resilience. I am inspired by your story. You have lived and are living a full life. You did not let this mental illness define you and shape your identity. You have overcome many struggles and are still overcoming some today. Yet, despite all that, you have stayed
strong. I am completely inspired by what you have accomplished and by your ability to find purpose and fulfillment in life. I wish you more fulfilling moments in life.

No. 78. 2015 & 79. 2017. These two pictures were made with crayons and black acrylic paint on top. To create the faces, I etched through the paint with a Philips screwdriver along with a straight slot screwdriver. The painting on the left is titled "Sam eye I am" and has three hearts that symbolize the Holy Trinity. It also has an earring of the cross of Loraine. The painting of Christ on the right is titled "How great thou art". It shows that he's Jewish and at peace during this time of trial. Both pieces were accepted into the Grand Rapids Art Prize competition.
No. 80. 2006.  This piece is found in David Meyer's psychology textbook, "Introduction to Psychology 101."  This artwork is one of many in a theme of mine that all depict multicolored puzzle-piece faces.  I believe that the puzzle pieces symbolize the many aspects of life with schizophrenia that make a whole experience.

Closing Thoughts.

I have learned to rely on the safe great power who watches over me as I go through life.  Without this Being around me, I would not be here today to tell my story.  I once prayed to understand the mystery of schizophrenia but did not get what I wanted. Instead, I received a stronger faith in God.
We all have a challenging lifetime on earth. Mine has included mind-boggling, tortured thoughts. Perhaps I was dealt a losing hand in this game of life. I prefer to translate the negative experiences into something positive. My art is one way I turn pain and chaos into beauty. I have written this book with the hope that my story will save others who are lost in mesmerizing thoughts—breaking their grip and drawing us back to the reality that most people call normal.

I also hope and pray that we can save lives and reduce misconceptions that many people have about such a powerful and scary disorder as schizophrenia. Discussions with Hope College students have helped me better understand my personal story, revealing many dimensions of schizophrenia. Indeed, we can all learn from each other—growing with every question and answer. My life has often entailed taking a step backward for every step forward. This is my testimony to a life of struggle with mental illness, but graced again and again with understanding friends, the saving help of doctors, and sheer joy translated into art. I am proud to share this life with you.