IN/SANITY TRIP
From PSYCHOSIS to DIAGNOSIS to FREEDOM
I was a relatively normal kid
I had an okay childhood
“Forgetting to Remember”

a poem

(in LEARNING TO SEE IN THREE DIMENSIONS)
1961-2, we lived in England

THE HAPPIEST YEAR OF MY CHILDHOOD
Nothing too unusual or traumatic had happened, not at least that I understood at that time though I know more now…

We returned to the USA in 1963…and a few months later…
PRESIDENT IS SLAIN

Suspect Held

LBJ Is Sworn In
A SKIING ACCIDENT AT AGE 10

My broken leg was set twice, the first time without anesthesia at Mt Snow, the second time only hours later, without...

AIR!
“If Wishes Were”
poem by
Pamela Spiro Wagner

in
LEARNING TO SEE IN THREE DIMENSIONS
Well, okay, maybe I had more childhood trauma than I allowed myself to be aware of...
Let’s start again
I heard voices for the first time starting the day Kennedy was killed, people telling me that I was the killer...
I believed them, and for decades blamed myself for the loss of "Camelot"
But because I did not know how to tell anyone, I mostly stopped speaking. Being called Zombie in high school was a relief.
I was afraid. I wanted someone to help me, to rescue me...

A LOT was going on, and a lot of denial
So “What’s bugging me?”
Instead of acknowledging the trauma in my life, I was taught to believe...
That my brain was ill...

That something was wrong with me
For decades in the system, diagnosed with “chronic paranoid schizophrenia” I almost gave up hope.
There were hospitals...

and more hospitals
We were told we could never recover completely.
Given drugs on top of drugs

AND BRAINWASHED WITH LIES...
After a while, psychiatry controlled my life and all my thinking
I became a regular in local hospitals

PSYCHIATRIE MACHT FREI  ARBEIT MACHT FREI

PSYCHIATRIE MACHT FREI  (LIKE A SCHIZ)

It's all about dopamine

DDD Dopamine

It's all about Dopamine! D A Anaabo

Dopamine AA Prozac Kills

Why deprive any human HUMAN?

off D 1 Dopamine? M M M S $ &

Haldol rips the throat out of life...
But no one recognized or acknowledged the trauma I had experienced. No one helped me get better or learn how to live better with the voices and visions and what they called “delusions”...
Like many, once on disability, I was written off and dismissed.
Hospital abuses started early, but I did not recognize that this “treatment” was abusive...
They called this “helping me…”

Dempsey Hospital at the University of Connecticut
Restrained like that for 3 days non-stop, I told no one for many years, blaming myself for what they did to me. Instead of recognizing abusiveness, I was taught to believe I must have deserved to be tortured.
Every MD should be required to take 10mg of this drug!
At the Institute of Living in 2013 they did not even pretend. This drawing was the first time I depicted abuse in hospitals. It was difficult but liberating to draw.
I also knew when staff enjoyed hurting me
and when it was just punishment
“Poem in Which I Speak Frankly, Forgive Me”

from

LEARNING TO SEE IN THREE DIMENSIONS
Meanwhile the voices got worse and more persistent, despite years of psychiatry and dubious meds. No one helped me see these things in a non-pathological light.
Complicating matters...

In 1999 I was bitten by a tick...
Lyme disease in my brain altered my world forever.
After a complete meltdown in “Y2K” I was psychotic for months
In 2004, voices told me to set myself on fire

And I obeyed...
Hospital abuse continued…
Hospital of Central Connecticut in New Britain - 2014
Rutland, VT 2016 – 9 point restraint chair, used as retaliation
I have depicted the voices, and hallucinations of other senses, in many ways but always it seems a failed attempt. They would remain utterly terrifying until seen thru a healing lens, instead of “mental illness”
Then there were the “little people” — non-abusive, bragging, nagging voices that usually did not bother me.
Art first came into my life one morning in 2007

I woke with a different voice, coming from inside my head this time: *Build a human, you must build a human*... And since I saw no reason not to, I did. In 3 months life-size Decorated Betsy was born.
A real miracle, art had changed my life completely…

Making art was how I took charge and communicated my experiences to others. I began saying how I felt and what I wanted. Alas, hospital staff did not always like this.
When I was made mute by trauma or the voices, my art spoke for me.
2012 Natchaug Hospital
I thought I could never draw faces. But a passion to learn changed everything...
This is just a tiny selection of my art since 2008 when I first began, at age 55.
Other life changes

• I left my home state of 58 years and moved to Vermont where I knew literally no one.
• I met people who were not interested in keeping me “mentally ill.” I met the woman I call my Guide, who sees the real me, and treats me with unconditional positive regard.
• She taught me NVC which helped me to feel more compassion and empathy, even for myself.
Despite childhood messages, I found out I *could* love others, and that I fell in love easily, once I felt safe.
Fear and paranoia faded
This huge collage, made of scraps of magazines And computer printouts, depicts a new hope. Even though the hand mirror outside reflects a seclusion room and restraint bed, if we look closer we notice that the bed is empty and the window opens onto a green vista, fresh air blowing the curtains wide.
“Ice Hospital”

a poem in
LEARNING TO SEE IN THREE DIMENSIONS
by pamela spiro wagner
Marshal Rosenberg’s NonViolent Communication changed my life completely. With its refusal to assign blame or make hurtful judgments, NVC’s quest is simply to find a path to inner peace through empathy and connection with others.
Thru NVC, I learned I could control my feelings and reactions. Amazingly, the voices grew less intrusive.
In NVC, no one can make me feel anything.

- I choose my response to other people; I can reframe my perceptions.
- I choose how I react with regard to others’ words or behaviors.
- When I stay aware of my emotions, I can pay less attention to the voices, because their source is clearer.
Yes, I am still expected to take prescribed meds
But frankly, I stopped them weeks ago, without negative consequences.
I can cope with the voices that remain
Meanwhile my style of art has changed dramatically...
“Dreamscapes” depicting psychosis gave way to Fractured Portraits
Tree of Life Beaded Bowl

All its paths are peace
“To Forgive is…”

a poem in WE MAD CLIMB SHAKY LADDERS
by Pamela Spiro Wagner
Beaded Donkey 8” high
Finally, I decided to change from my birth name, which I always hate to my true name:

PHOEBE SPARROW WAGNER

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Art, my fourth miracle, is deeply fulfilling. Nevertheless, I keep my options open to changes and other miracles in the future.
“The real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize...All is a miracle.”

Thich Nhat Hanh
Thank you for coming

I hope this has helped you and that you can take something from it that will be of use. Please help spread the word that schizophrenia is not hopeless or even a meaningful diagnosis. People can get better and move on into happy lives.
DIVIDED MINDS: Twin Sisters and their Journey through Schizophrenia (St Martins Press, 2005)
WE MAD CLIMB SHAKY LADDERS

poems about the experience of “mental Illness”,
(Cavankerry Press, 2009)
Learning to See in Three Dimensions

poems and art, (Green Writers Press/Sundog Poetry, 2017)
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THANK YOU

THE END

ALL ORIGINAL ART 2008-18  by
Pamela Spiro Wagner

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