



## Spirit Queen

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**P**reface: In my childhood, I lived with a family member suffering from paranoid schizophrenia. The painting is my interpretation of the inner turmoil that this family member faces regularly. It is my hope that the viewers of this painting can gain some insight into the difficulties involved in living with a chronic mental illness that cannot be fully understood. The painting depicts a person with paranoid schizophrenia attempting to balance her perceived reality between

cultural beliefs, logical reasoning, and schizophrenic delusion. The image shows a young child looking down on her brain encased in a coiled golden ribbon to illustrate the dichotomy of the body and mind. The four corners of the painting are weathered and deteriorating to demonstrate the progressive nature of the disease/illness.

**The physical self:** The brain, along with the snake-like ribbon and the roots emanating from the spinal

cord, represents scientific medicine and the child's corporeal body. The spinal roots spread and tangle chaotically to convey the individual's inability to control the health of her own body. The child cannot fully understand the physical self that she is analyzing and, thus, keeps her hands distant from it.

**The psychological self:** The individual is depicted as a child to emphasize her innocence and naiveté regarding her condition. To her, she believes that she is a wealthy and powerful queen (as demonstrated by her many accessories and jewelry) that has been possessed by demons that are hindering her life in a multitude of ways that only she can understand. I illustrate the demons here as golden orbs floating above her in the heavy purple mist bearing down on her mind.

**The social self:** The child bears an immense robe that simultaneously protects her and acts as a heavy burden. The robe, adorned with homeopathic herbs and bandages, represents cultural healing. In the individual's culture, the illness is curable through alternative medications and spiritual cleansing. While the individual has been trying her best to ward away her demons, she is burdened by their inevitable presence within her mind/spirit. The scarf that wraps around her is covered in eyes, representing society and the paranoia that she is constantly being observed and judged.

The scarf is purposely reflected out of the border as a reminder to the viewer that we, society, are indeed observing and judging these individuals unintentionally or intentionally.

**The message:** Four extra hands are depicted around the image. These hands are instructions. Starting with the hand holding the flame, in the bottom right; I remind myself and the viewer that interacting with a person with paranoid schizophrenia can be extremely frustrating and discouraging. However, one must learn to temper frustrations in order to make the best decisions. The next hand holding the flower in the bottom left represents the fragility of interaction. One must realize that being over protective or judgmental can destroy the mutual relationship. Yet, being too passive will not lead to any changes in behavior. Thus, one must balance interactions carefully, as if holding a flower that can be easily crushed. Next, a hand holds its palm outward on the top right. This hand is an indicator to "stop and think" about how we are influenced by social stereotypes and biases before passing judgment on individuals with mental illness. The last hand, pointing upward on the top left, is a reminder that dealing with mental illness takes lots and lots of time. Thus, we should take our steps one at a time, day by day, week by week, with patience and integrity.