

BROKEN
PIECES
AND THE GOD
WHO MENDS THEM

SCHIZOPHRENIA
THROUGH A MOTHER'S EYES



SIMONETTA CARR

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL HORTON

Broken Pieces and the God Who Mends Them is the poignant story of a mother's emotional and spiritual journey alongside her son as he battles with cannabis abuse and schizophrenia. Simonetta Carr writes powerfully and movingly as she chronicles her son's decline into mental illness, his change of character, her daily anxiety and guilt, and the effects of his illness on the rest of the family. The book is not only a medical voyage down the corridors of doctors, psychiatrists, and hospitals but also a spiritual pilgrimage through the Gospels. With the help of her church and Christian friends, the author leads us down an important path of how to come to terms with mental illness on many levels. This book is an essential resource and guide for anyone living with or around schizophrenia.

—**Jonathan Aitken**, Former UK Cabinet Minister; Author, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*

The most honest and deeply moving Christian book I've read in a long time. Simonetta opens up her broken heart to show us the painful darkness and agonizing tragedy of serious mental illness. But she also opens the door of hope and help for other families by sharing the hard-won knowledge and resources she discovered both in the common grace of God and in the church of God. May this book transform her beloved son Jonathan's death into life for many others.

—**David Murray**, Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids; Author, *Christians Get Depressed Too*

In *Broken Pieces and the God Who Mends Them*, Simonetta vulnerably lays open her heart and shares a story of love and loss, of suffering and redemption. She masterfully explores the brokenness of the mental health care system, the imperfections of our

churches, the confusion of those who live in the grip of mental illness, and the shattered hearts of those who love them. Yet in the midst of the pain and brokenness, Simonetta keeps drawing us back to the God who mends—the God of grace. *Broken Pieces* is a definite must-read for those who love someone living with a serious mental illness.

—**Bev Roozeboom**, Author, *A Day in the Life: A Glimpse into the Chaos—and Hope—of Families with Children Living in the Grip of Chronic Mental Health Disorders*; Class Instructor, National Alliance on Mental Illness

Simonetta Carr describes a painful journey that no parent ever wishes or expects to travel: the two years lasting from her son Jonathan's diagnosis of schizophrenia to his death. She tells the story with vulnerability, expressing the pain that she, her husband, her son Jonathan, and their other children experienced, as well as their fear, frustration, helplessness, lament, and desperate seeking after God. By beginning many chapters with entries from Jonathan's journal, she invites him to speak into the story as well. In this raw and emotional story, many parents who are on unexpected and unwanted journeys with their own children's mental illnesses will find a fellow traveler who tells her story and provides wisdom and even hope that God is faithful in the darkest circumstances.

—**Mark Stephenson**, Director of Disability Concerns, Christian Reformed Church in North America

The church has historically not understood mental illness well or handled those who have mental illness with appropriate care and compassion. That is thankfully changing, but many Christians still suffer from common illnesses such as depression and from even rarer ones such as psychosis and schizophrenia. To that we

can add the countless family members who suffer because of the havoc they see these things wreaking on the lives of those they love. Simonetta Carr is one such person, and here is a heartfelt and heartbreaking account of how her own family has been affected by such and how she still found hope, even in the darkest hour, in the God who saves.

—**Carl Trueman**, Christian Theologian and Church Historian; Professor at Grove City College

The most inspiring story I've ever read. Here is a woman who has suffered the greatest pain a woman can be said to suffer—the loss of her child. And yet that loss has refined and beautified her in a way that leaves the beholder awestruck at the mercy and goodness of God. This is a story of how God's grace and love really can and do sustain his people through even the most agonizing times—even redeeming them to sanctify and glorify.

—**Brooke Ventura**, Assistant Editor, *Modern Reformation*

A Christian mother's moving, practical, courageous, and eloquent reflections on the emotional turmoil involved in caring for a son with schizophrenia. She takes the reader deep into wrestling with all the emotions and questions that are raised by such a devastating illness. This is by far the best book I have encountered that combines wise personal, medical, psychological, historical, and deeply theological insights on a controversial topic. A great resource for families, students, and professionals.

—**Richard Winter**, Psychotherapist; Professor Emeritus of Applied Theology and Counseling, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri

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To find resources, articles, and discussions related to this book, visit the author's website, www.cbfyf.com, and click on Other Works.

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In memory of Jonathan Branch Carr

“He picks up my broken pieces.”

Jonathan Carr

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Foreword

For several years, my children had a Sunday school teacher who not only taught them Scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism but also wrote books on the lives of great Christians throughout history. Clear, always informed, and yet humble, Simonetta Carr is a gift to the broader church of Christ and to the particular church of which we were members. Our families became friends, and we enjoyed her generous Italian hospitality in her home.

But Simonetta's life was shattered. She will tell her own story in these pages. We have all suffered in various ways—yet there is nothing more disorienting and despairing than being totally helpless as you watch your own child suffer and go to his grave before you. Simonetta experienced a depth of horror—it cannot be put more delicately—that my wife and I struggled to imagine. Through it all, Simonetta clung tenaciously to God's promises, but it was—and is—a kind of brokenness that makes us uncomfortable. It brings us face-to-face with our own mortality and the reality that this is not the way things were meant to be. Her story gently directs us to that fork in the road where we either find our only rest in Christ and his redeeming love or turn our back

on the promise in sheer desperation and resentment. We need stories like hers, in which the right path is taken—but only by God’s gracious grip.

This is a story about a mother’s fierce love for a son—which I have seen firsthand. It is also a story about a subject that churches, even still, are often ill-prepared to handle: mental illness—in this case, schizophrenia. It is amazing that in an age of medical advancement, when we do not hesitate to rush to the doctor for symptoms of cancer or respiratory illness, so many Christians treat mental diseases as spiritual problems that can be solved with more prayer, Bible reading, and imperatives to be more content. A big part of the problem, I think, is that we imbibe a modern dualism (one that’s associated especially with the philosopher Descartes) between mind and body, and then confuse the mind with the soul. But the mind is not the soul. It is the brain, and the brain is an organ—like the lungs and liver. Mental illness is a medical problem, a physical ailment, that requires professional treatment. Like all illnesses, it certainly involves the soul and requires the spiritual remedies of preaching, sacrament, prayer, pastoral care, and fellowship of the saints. But we need to think of mental illness like cancer.

My wife and I saw the huge emotional, physical, and spiritual toll that this illness took on each member of Simonetta’s family. Simonetta holds nothing back as she describes fighting against the bureaucracy of hospitals and insurance companies, bringing hope to her other children when she herself felt weary and weak, and loving someone who often pushed her away because of a wretched disease. Yet what comes through so clearly is God’s sovereignty and the comfort of the gospel.

Because of these experiences, as well as the depth of her knowledge of God's Word, Simonetta is able to provide practical wisdom for our own daily struggles through life—including its crises. She teaches us how to become an advocate for those whom we love in a system that can seem cold and heartless at times. She also teaches us how a church can love and provide spiritual care to someone with schizophrenia (and, by extension, to those with other mental health disorders).

In all these ways, this book offers a treasure of truth, wisdom, and practical advice that is desperately needed by us all. Whether we are suffering ourselves, suffering because of a loved one, or just caring for brothers and sisters in crisis, Simonetta's hard-won insights will bring fresh perspective to the meaning of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 12:26: "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." With Simonetta's help, we will learn better how to suffer and rejoice together.

Michael Horton

Introduction

This is not a “how-to” book. In fact, it might very well be a “how-not-to” book. Caring for someone with mental illness is always difficult. I venture to say this is particularly true when your loved one has schizophrenia, because the person you have known for so long is often gone, and you are left with a stranger no one has taught you how to understand and love.

Some have compared schizophrenia to Alzheimer’s. In some ways, though, schizophrenia is more intense and devastating, because it doesn’t just erase a personality—it substitutes it with another. This can be terrifying.

The first part of the book simply tells our experience, pieced together largely from emails and diaries that were written at the time of the events. It’s the story of my slow attempts at discovering the new person my son had become and at finding a proper way to love him and guide him. It’s written in first person and mostly in the present tense, as if I were reliving each event. The events are told in chronological order, and no dialogue is invented. I have, however, changed a few names in the text to protect the identity of people who have chosen to remain anonymous.

Most of the time, I didn't include my husband Tom's thoughts and feelings, because I can't speak for him. This doesn't mean he was absent. To the contrary, he suffered deeply and intensely at my side. Most decisions about the care of our son were made together, but I had to make many on the spur of the moment.

The second part of the book is based on important questions I have received in the few years after my son's death. I am not an expert in this field, and I have read only a few of the large number of books that are available on this subject. I am not endorsing every portion of the books that are quoted in this volume. Many of the suggestions in this second section are given by parents, psychiatrists, pastors, and people with schizophrenia who have come into my life at different times. I hope this book will be helpful in conjunction with other, similar books.

In addition, any suggestion I have included here should be adapted to the individual situation. One of the most important lessons that I learned through my experience is not to take any word of advice as a step-by-step guide—as tempting as that can be. Every case is unique, and what works in one instance may not work in another.

Our family is Christian, and our theology has played an essential part in this story, shaping our view of the events and informing our responses. With this book, I am hoping to encourage other parents and relatives of people living with schizophrenia and possibly with other mental illnesses—regardless of their religious convictions—as they keep reading, finding resources, and seeking help.

PART 1

THROUGH THE
UNKNOWN

JONATHAN'S STORY

1

What's Happening?

*I am a timid mere cat
always quick to flinch.
I am your first ever
eccentric snowflake.
(Jonathan Carr)*

“Mom, is this a game?”

Jonathan is sitting at a computer in front of me. My husband Tom has gotten him out of bed early to work on college applications. His eyes are perplexed and searching.

“Do you want to play a game?” I ask, hoping it can be that simple.

“No. Is this a game?”

“Do you mean life?”

“Yes.”

I muster up all the poise I can and give some theological explanation about how life can seem like a game but God is in perfect control. All the while, an ominous feeling grips my heart. He adds something, but it's hard to make sense of what he is saying.

“I don't understand this extension.”

“What do you mean?”

“This extension of life.”

I scramble to find another explanation. Life can be confusing at eighteen.

My heart is racing. Calmly, I go to another corner of the house, where I frantically phone my husband. Hearing the panic in my voice, he comes back from work.

“Your mother is worried. How can we help you?”

“I need help to understand this extension,” he repeats.

It has been six months since Jonathan left for the University of California, Merced, with high hopes and aspirations—and only three months since he returned. In the past, he was always a top student. In high school he attended an internship program in a couple of hospitals and decided to study medicine. He won a small scholarship. His grades were good and his SAT scores high, especially in math. In spite of this, he didn't make it through the first semester. He failed two of his four courses and was asked to leave. At least, so he told us.

Naturally we were disappointed, but we encouraged him to try other avenues. At one point my husband spoke to him sternly, and Jonathan cried. It was disconcerting. None of our boys had ever cried at that age. If anything, they tried to act tough.

Is that the “extension” he is talking about? A new direction in life, new choices? His eyes look anguished and empty at the same time. What's happening?

Charming Boy

The fifth of eight children (seven boys and one girl), Jonathan has always been one of a kind. Right from his birth

What's Happening?

in Viterbo, Italy, he has impressed others with his alertness and cheerful disposition. His observant brown eyes, highlighted by long eyelashes, have always seemed ready to take in the world—often sparkling with excitement or twinkling with perceptive humor.



Jonathan, at age 14, with three of his siblings at his oldest brother's wedding. From left to right: Angelo Kevin, Renaissance, Jonathan, and Raphael

The name Jonathan seemed only fitting for a boy who was born after our son David. We hoped they would become good friends, like David and Jonathan in the Bible. His middle name was Branch. We were into nature names at that time; we just didn't have the courage to use it as his first name.

As his brothers were, he was homeschooled from an early age. He could read and write at the age of four and

grasped mathematical concepts before most children. He especially enjoyed converting years into days, hours, minutes, and seconds. His mind was always active—investigating, calculating, analyzing.

As he grew up, he started to challenge his friends with perplexing math problems, to write insightful poetry, to dispute scientific claims and social conventions, and to invent genial games. His brothers still remember his game of “Gabagoochee,” which was set in medieval times and was, in their words, “the greatest game ever invented.”

Analyzing sports was also a passion, and his predictions were usually correct. He chose to support the Detroit Lions, for no reason other than they were the underdogs. When it came to playing, he was not the best; but he refused to give up. His Little League team exploded into a roar of claps and cheers when he hit the ball for the first time after months of unsuccessful but determined attempts.

He was hopelessly forgetful, but we attributed it to his genius—he was our “absent-minded professor.” Often quiet, he found his spark in social settings and charmed those around him with his irresistible smile.

He saw himself as very intelligent but meek. This he expressed, when he was thirteen, in a poem entitled “I Am.”

I am a homing pigeon
always trying to get back home.
I am a luscious meatball
never biting back.
I am a wise old gramps
always wanting to give advice.
I am a sports fan's chair
always waiting for a score.

I am a slippery worm
never causing problems as I go down.
I am a timid mere cat
always quick to flinch.
I am your first ever
eccentric snowflake.

His depth of thought was evident in matters of religion. He was only six when we started to attend a small Reformed church. After years at a fairly typical evangelical megachurch, I found the level of quality and abundance of theological teachings refreshing. Still, I was not sure how the kids would react to this quiet atmosphere in which parents and children worshipped together and Sunday school lessons came from an unedited, unillustrated catechism written in the sixteenth century.

Jonathan told me immediately how much he liked it. “Finally I am learning something,” he said. In the other church, as in various Vacation Bible Schools we had tried, the lessons for children revolved around the same Bible stories (Noah and the ark, David and Goliath, Joseph and his coat), without getting any further than the few superficial details that would keep the children’s interest alive.

He took religion seriously. He studied the catechism and had a clear understanding of theology. When it was time to pray, while his brothers resorted to the usual “Dear Lord, thank you for this day, help us to have a good day,” he developed a very methodical system of using the Lord’s Prayer as a framework, expanding on the “give us this day our daily bread” clause.

At church, he liked to sit in the front pew, where he helped his younger siblings to find their place in the hymnal

and sang along with them. At home, he was always ready to teach them.

He made a public profession of faith when he was twelve. At that time, he was probably the youngest child to do so at our church. When he told me that he wanted to do it, I spoke very soberly to him to make sure that he knew what he was doing.

At our church, as in most Reformed churches, new members take a public oath, stating their belief in the historical articles of the Christian faith and promising to uphold them, confessing Jesus Christ as their only Savior and their desire to live a godly life, and promising to submit to the correction of the church government (the pastors and elders) if they ever “become delinquent in doctrine or in life.” It is, of course, a voluntary agreement. Jonathan assured me he was ready to do it. He was examined by the elders and demonstrated a deep understanding of Christian doctrines, even at his young age.

Signs of Change

Having brought up four boys before Jonathan, Tom and I were used to the turmoil of the teenage years, with their natural desire for independence that is often frustrated by fearful apprehensions. Our older sons were often more irritable and edgy. We thought it was the same for Jonathan, although we realized that he was much more sensitive than the others.

He seemed especially annoyed by anything that he couldn't consider fair or logical and had to reason things out within his mind. At sixteen, he wrote in a paper for his Sunday School class, “I can't understand why it is that important

to make my bed—whether it is made or not, nothing will change. And for a while I just stopped unless it was convenient. However, I thought about things we have learned and finally I gave myself one good reason. My dad wants me to. God wants me to. God saved me from eternity in hell.”

One sign of his independence was trying different things with his hair. The mohawk phase was the shortest, as it was almost impossible to maintain with curly hair. For a while, he let his hair grow as long as he could, ending up with a soft afro. Just before college, he decided to try dreadlocks. Since his hair was still too short for that look, he looked more like a porcupine.

Academically, he had no difficulty maintaining A-levels. He was extremely driven. At the end of his junior year in high school, while attending a summer internship aimed at introducing young people to medical careers, he was also playing football. The schedules conflicted, but he refused to give up either one. We had to take a trip at the same time as his internship, so he stayed home alone. Every morning, he woke up at 4 a.m., walked to the local high school, played football for a couple of hours, and then took a bus to the hospital, where he stayed until 5 p.m. When he returned home, he did a large amount of homework. We still don't know how he managed, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

His efforts were admirable but also perplexing. His drive seemed almost excessive, and, unlike his older brothers, he never wanted to ask for help. When we returned from our trip, we were appalled by the conditions of the house. With a large family, we were used to a mess, but what we found was extreme. He had left food to rot in various parts of the kitchen.

Teaching him to drive was also different from anything

I had experienced with my other sons. He didn't seem to concentrate on the road ahead and often stopped just inches away from objects or people. I usually returned home shocked and frazzled. "You take him from now on!" I would tell my husband. We were surprised when he passed the driving test.

During his senior year, Jonathan attended a program designed to help minorities to get into college and won a modest scholarship. He had several options. For example, he was admitted at West Point Military Academy, where pursuing a medical career would have been financially easier. He had some interviews with other prestigious colleges, as well. In the end, he chose to attend UC Merced, a fairly new college in a quiet and scenic place.

We continued to see changes in his behavior. He became quieter. A few times, he went out with friends at night without telling us. It was unusual, but due to his past behavior we continued to trust him. We were puzzled, however, to see him cry when my husband talked to him about his new habits, as he did during my husband's later talk about his slackness in contacting colleges.

As he prepared to leave, he gave his faithful, huge, raggedy teddy bear to his girlfriend Anna to keep while he was gone. Anna had been his girlfriend for almost two years. She was a very sweet and polite young girl from a good Christian family. Jonathan was extremely fond of her. We often joked that, out of all our children, he might end up marrying at the youngest age.

The church also gave him a formal farewell. As is customary when someone leaves the church, either to transfer to another church or to move away temporarily, we all prayed for him at the end of the Sunday service and finished with the song "In Christ Alone."

No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.¹

As usual, our pastor, Rev. Michael Brown, handed him a book. What was unusual was the book itself. Normally, young people going to college received a book on apologetics. Jonathan received *Too Good to Be True*—a book by Michael Horton, who is also the assistant pastor of our church, on understanding suffering and following by faith the difficult paths God may lay before us.

Jonathan came back from Merced a few times. Each time he was disheveled, holding his laptop under his arm without a bag. We thought it was all part of his absentmindedness. The final visit was at Christmas. He told us he had failed two classes and been expelled from college.

We were shocked but tried to encourage him to move on. Tom suggested he appeal to the college.

“If you don’t, you’ll end up living at home and going to the local community college,” Tom said. “Your mother thinks you should stay home.”

Of course I did. I am Italian. I think all my kids should stay home forever.

“I want to stay home,” he said. I was comforted, but it was definitely strange to hear from our free-spirited eighteen-year-old.

After the holidays, everyone resumed school. Jonathan

1. “In Christ Alone,” words and music by Keith Getty & Stuart Townend copyright © 2002 thankyou music. Used with permission.

signed up for a couple of classes at Grossmont College and waited for the new semester to start. In the meantime, he spent most of his time in his room quietly.

That's when I received a shocking phone call from Pastor Brown. He had discovered that Jonathan had been smoking marijuana. Jonathan? Really? We had never suspected it. Not from him. And how had our pastor found out?

Church Discipline

Apparently, Jonathan had been smoking for some time and had convinced Anna to smoke with him. His “theological” grounds (which I discovered later) were that the Bible didn't expressly forbid marijuana, so it could be included in the same class as wine—a substance “to gladden the heart of man” (Ps. 104:15). Anna agreed to try it, but her mother caught her and, after hearing the explanation, decided to contact Pastor Brown to see whether this “doctrine” was taught in our church.

Initially we hoped this was just a passing fad—something he had tried at college and would easily put aside, especially since it had obviously affected his grades. For sure, he would listen to our pastor and stop.

Things were not so easy. Pastor Brown took him out for breakfast to talk to him, then discussed the matter with the elders. Since Jonathan seemed intent on continuing his habit, two elders talked to him separately. Finally, the church consistory (the administrative body of the elders and pastor) decided to ban him from the Lord's Table in order to impress on him the seriousness of his offense.

Church discipline has become a foreign concept in most contemporary churches. To outsiders, it has an ominous

sound, reminiscent of the Inquisition or—at the very least—of narrow-minded intolerance. In reality, it is simply a system of pastoral correction for those who stray in doctrine or in life. It is exercised only on those who have previously agreed to submit to it, and it's done with the goal of guiding the individuals and leading them back to the obedience they have professed to desire.

In other words, if our church government determined that, in Jonathan's case, smoking marijuana was a sin, he could accept it, contest it (by appealing to the synod—a meeting of church leaders), or simply move to a church that allows such behavior.

Jonathan was visibly disturbed by the church's decision. Still, he didn't say much and was not ready to admit that smoking marijuana was a sin.

To me, as a Christian mother, the whole situation was devastating. What did it mean? Did he still have faith in Christ? Was it just a difference of opinion? Is marijuana usage really a sin?

Pastor Brown explained that, first of all, marijuana was still illegal, so Jonathan was breaking state laws—which, according to Romans 13, Christians are supposed to keep. The main issue, however, was Jonathan's desire to get high. "Using a drug to get high is the same thing as deliberately using alcohol to get drunk," Pastor Brown said. "It's the sin of drunkenness and does not produce the fruit of the Spirit. It does just the opposite." This was something that Jonathan was not willing to admit.

Just a few weeks later, Anna came to return Jonathan's teddy bear and break off their relationship, maybe as a result of her parents' suggestion. After she left, Jonathan stayed in his room. He told me what happened only a few

days later, when I asked him why she had stopped coming over.

Within a month, Jonathan has now been expelled from school, been disciplined by the church, and lost his girlfriend. Emotionally, the last blow has probably been the hardest. He was deeply in love.

Depression and More

It's around this time that Jonathan tells me about his problems with his "life extension." By now he has sunk into a very recognizable depression. He spends most of the day, every day, in his room, playing chess online. Sometimes he sits in the living room with the TV on with no sound, not really watching. Other times he turns the volume up as high as he can and stands there without apparent emotion. Frequently my husband has to get up in the middle of the night in order to turn off the blaring TV downstairs.

He eats little and bathes even less. He stays up all night and sleeps during the day. He seems nervous, often bouncing his legs or tapping his hands on something.

I talk to Anna. She tells me she had noticed some changes in his behavior when he returned from college but thought it was just because he had been away for a while. She is sorry he is having problems and decides to take him out to lunch. Her parents had taken her to a Christian counselor, and she really likes him. Maybe she can suggest him to Jonathan.

I am thrilled. A few days later, Anna tells me that Jonathan is not the same person she knew. "He was pretty quiet," she says. "He definitely seems different. I don't know how to put my finger on it, but he seems a bit disconnected. I got the impression he was depressed, because all he had to

say was that he doesn't do much of anything these days and doesn't get out much." He didn't respond to her suggestion to see a therapist.

We watch him carefully. He seems to be off drugs but still on another planet. It breaks my heart to see him this way. If I hug him, he hugs me back tight. If I talk to him, he thanks me. His sweet disposition makes me suffer even more. If he were rebellious, I could steel my heart. I am not sure whether he realizes he needs help, and that hurts me even more.

I feel lost. Sometimes I sit by him and say nothing. I am normally a very busy person, juggling a few tasks at the same time, but now I stop everything and sit in our backyard with him, staring with him at the distance. If this were the sixties, I tell him, we could wear some colorful bands on our heads and look perfectly "groovy."

College starts, so we encourage him to attend his classes. He drives by himself, but we aren't sure whether he makes it to the college. Finally he stops going altogether. We ask him to cancel the classes, to salvage what is left of his academic record, but he doesn't. We try to find him some part-time jobs to make use of his time.

My friend Kris says that her husband Bill might be able to use him. Bill is a landscaper, and Jonathan has worked for him in the past. The physical work and fresh air may help. Jonathan works for a few days without putting in much effort. Then he never contacts Bill again—not even to pick up his pay.

Brian, an elder at our church and a manager at In-N-Out, tries to find Jonathan a job in one of their branches. It seems like a great opportunity—easy position, good pay. Brian tries to coach him on how to present himself and how to dress. Jonathan used to know this well. In the past, he

went to many important college interviews. This time, he nods but never shows much interest. Finally, Brian sets up an interview.

"I am risking my reputation," Brian tells me. "I am recommending Jonathan, but he needs to be everything I know he can be."

Jonathan still has his struggling dreadlocks. In-N-Out cares a lot about appearance, so they have to go. I explain it to him, and he agrees to cut them off. Since they are not well done (they don't start close to the scalp), I conclude that a regular barber can do the job. I ask if he wants to make an appointment.

"No; I'll just go before the interview."

I give him some space. He spends the day on the living room couch, with the TV on and the sound off. A couple of hours before the set time, I start to nudge him.

"Shouldn't you go now?"

He nods.

"Let's go, then."

I am sure few things are as bothersome as a nagging mother, but his responses frustrate me.

"Do you still want to go?"

"Yes."

"Okay, then; you should go."

Finally, I drive with him to the barber shop—in a separate car so he can go to the interview right after the haircut. He parks and sits in his car.

"Are you going in?"

"Yes."

He finally stands in front of the barber shop, still hesitating. I push him inside, then sit in my car, feeling terribly guilty. When he comes out, looking like a ruffled brown

chick, he unsuccessfully tries to start his car. He apparently left the keys in the ignition, partially turned, and the old battery didn't make it.

By that time my husband is home from work, so I call for help and leave Jonathan with him while I go to teach Italian. It's too late for Jonathan's interview. He has to call and cancel. My feelings of guilt mount throughout the evening. What if he had a strong emotional attachment to those dreadlocks?

At home, I find Jonathan sitting on his bed, in semi-darkness, staring at the wall. His fingers whirl one of the tiny dreadlock stumps that are left on his head.

"I am sorry I pushed you," I say.

"It's okay."

"Did you make another appointment?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."

No change of motion, no eye contact, no display of feeling—just the same absent stare at the wall in front of him and the same whirling of the same truncated strand.

Seeking Help

Jonathan eventually makes it to the job interview but, needless to say, doesn't pass. He is well dressed and groomed. I have bought him new clothes and shoes for the occasion. He has, however, another problem.

"He didn't say anything," says Brian. "He just stood there and stared."

At home, he keeps displaying strange behaviors. His handwriting, once small and neat, becomes huge and messy.

He draws large scribbles on paper or writes apparently senseless sentences. Even his speech stops making sense. Once, we find him sleeping on our roof—a typical, slanted, tiled roof. Another morning, my husband finds him in a hammock outside. The weather is cold and humid. Tom brings him a blanket, and Jonathan thanks him.

We are confused and distressed. He is supposed to meet again with the elders at church in a few days, but I can't see how he will manage. I email a dear friend at my church who has had some struggles with depression.

"If Jonathan is having a difficult time thinking straight, then until that is addressed I don't believe he can represent his views on his circumstances properly," she says. "I have the name and number of a psychiatrist in Encinitas, if you would like it. I have had a session with her myself and have been helped."

I also talk to one of my students, a therapist. He recommends a family counselor closer to our home. Taking my son to any professional will be difficult because he doesn't think that he has a problem, but a counselor may be an easier choice than a psychiatrist. Somehow, I convince Jonathan to try.

"Is this a career counselor?" he asks me in the car.

"No—it's a life counselor, just to see what we can do to help you."

Upset, he insists that we go back. I beg him to try. He squirms in the seat. In the meantime, I get lost and have to ask for directions. My level of frustration mounts as Jonathan continues to demand that we turn around. Finally, I park by the counselor's office. Jonathan refuses to go in.

"Okay; I'll go by myself, because we have to pay no matter what," I say.

I get out of the car and start walking. Jonathan follows me.

Peter Lautz is a welcoming man with a wide smile and a warm personality. He asks Jonathan if he can have me sit in on the session. To my surprise, Jonathan agrees, and he candidly answers all his questions. Pressed to display his lucidity, he plays the part well. He tells Peter that he has friends he sees regularly. I smile when he compliments my cooking.

“Are you going to school?”

“No; I stopped.”

“Why?”

“I thought there was more to life.”

“So what do you do now?”

“Play video games, watch TV . . .”

What a life, I think. Actually, he doesn't even do that. He watches TV without sound or stares at walls.

“Have you used any drugs?”

“Yes—marijuana.”

“How much?”

“A lot.”

“Any other drugs?”

“I had mushrooms twice.”

My eyes widen, but I remain silent. Jonathan is still emotionless, but his body starts twitching. He incessantly bounces one knee and rubs his hands on his arms nervously.

“Have you stopped?”

“Yes.”

“For how long?”

“Six months.”

“Do you find that your mind is clearer?”

“Yes.”

Then Peter asks an unexpected question.

“Do you ever hear voices?”

“Yes.”

This statement shocks me to the core, but I don't show it. Peter wants to know more.

“They come from inside me, but they bounce back in the fish tank's bubbles,” Jonathan explains. “Also, when someone talks to me, I hear something else. Sometimes I hear two or three voices at the same time.”

Stunned, I try to understand what he is saying. I imagine other voices covering mine as I speak to him. What does he really hear?

Peter recommends a doctor's visit and some tests, just to rule out any physical cause. He tells Jonathan to exercise, preferably outside, and to try some creative activity—maybe painting.

As soon as we leave the building, Jonathan turns to me. “What a waste of time!”

“At least he gave you some ideas about exercising and painting.”

“I could have come up with the same things.”

For a few days, he looks upset. “I can't believe you took me to a therapist,” he says. Again, I feel guilty and lost. Am I doing the right thing? How do I know what's right? Tom and I have been discussing Jonathan's care, but most of the time Tom lets me follow my instincts. I have never liked to make decisions.

Tom and I decide to follow Peter's orders. First we put Jonathan on Tom's HMO insurance. The premiums are expensive, but we foresee long-term care. Then we make an appointment with a general practitioner. I ask Tom to take Jonathan this time. I have antagonized my son enough.

Jonathan puts up a little struggle but finally gets to the doctor's office. The doctor orders tests and schedules him to see a psychiatrist. Taking our son to the mental clinic is harder, but my husband acts calmly and pragmatically, and Jonathan complies. A few days after the initial evaluation, I return with Jonathan to hear the results. Physically, he is in perfect shape. Mentally, it's another story.

His case manager proceeds to explain that Jonathan has schizophrenia. Surprised by her bluntness, I ask her to clarify. I've always thought of schizophrenia as a dual personality. She briefly describes the illness, gives me a list of resources I can use to find support, and hands Jonathan a fact sheet and a prescription for Risperidone. Very prudently, she asks him to sign a consent paper allowing his parents to be aware of his appointments, diagnosis, and medications. He signs without much concern.