

A Defence of Being Different

by Lorna Green

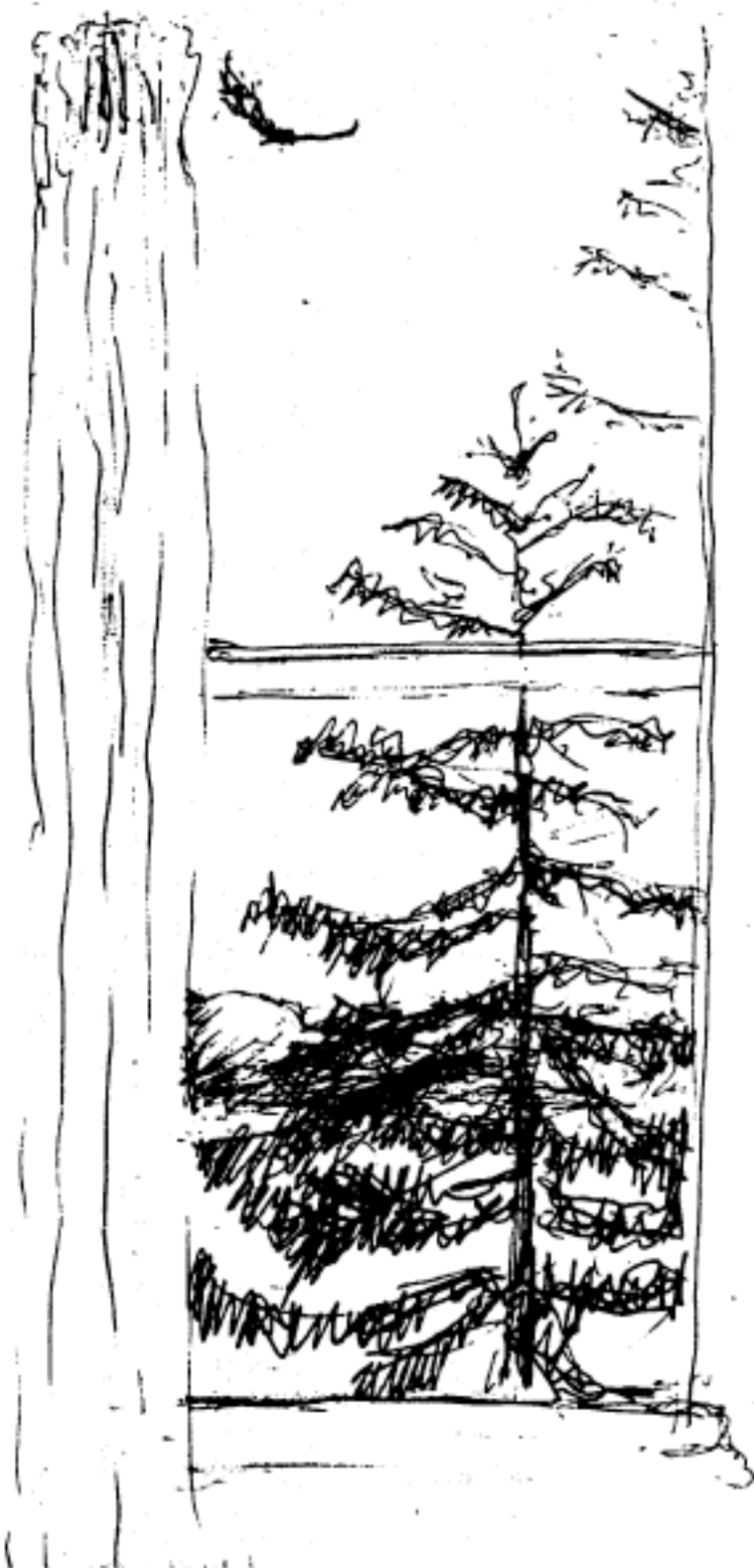
I am 48 years old. I have been hospitalized five times, first when I was 26, most recently when I was 46. No labels were applied to me until my fourth hospitalization, when, as a result of arriving in "mute stupor," I was designated "schizophrenic."

I cannot bear labels, especially when they are merely a camouflage for the ignorance of the medical profession. For me, labeling is a way of saying "you're abnormal, you're not healthy, you don't count." I fretted under this label for two years. And then, on Christmas Day, my sense of being different from other people – of being "sick" – overwhelmed me. Refusing to be crushed by this negative sense of myself, I wrote the self-portrait that follows.

You may have been given labels too, because you have difficulty "fitting in." It is not necessary to consider yourself "sick," with all the negative connotations of that word, just because you are a nonconformist.

I urge you to resist the negative connotations of the label "schizophrenic," and avoid future hospitalizations. You may be on a spiritual path. If you are hospitalized again, I have one suggestion to make. *Help others.* There is no faster road to healing that I know of, and this will ensure that your stay is short.

This is my gift to all who, like me, have been labeled "schizophrenic."





Self-portrait

I am more in touch with the unconscious mind than many people. I write from the unconscious. My ideas come welling up from the depths. My thoughts are not "sick" thoughts, but the most beautiful there are, for our unconscious opens into eternity – into the realm of the spirit. I love to be alone, exulting in my own being.

Having grown up in intense family life in which I was always "caught in the glance of the other," I revel in the silence, the solitude, the hiddenness of my life. I enjoy spending much time brooding over ideas and staying in touch with my own feelings.

My rich inner life is totally inhibited when other people are around. As one of my "normal" friends put it, I go on "hold" if other people are there.

I first got in touch with the unconscious at the monastery of Pecos, New Mexico. I have practised for some time a life of prayer. I live without many of the defences that mask others, for it is a goal of the contemplative to live without defences, so that she can be approached by anyone. I see what others do not, because I live with my heart, with feeling. I experience a reality that people whose lives are wholly taken up with

external events do not experience.

Without defences, I am open and vulnerable to others. On the hospital ward, I have related to people on a much deeper level than in ordinary life. And I have experienced, there and in monasteries, some of the greatest mysteries of the spirit coming to me through relationships.

I need to share my ideas, thoughts and insights with others, but I am very sensitive to rejection in relationships. Relationships with people in the ordinary world are the hardest thing for me. I can usually handle only one person at a time. The child inside me lives close to the surface, and I need a lot of acceptance before I will reveal the treasures of my soul. But I need that child. She is the seer in me.

When I feel my oddness with other people, I often feel embarrassed about "knowing how to be." Then that little voice inside me says, "but you're just schizophrenic. You're sick." And I feel deprived of personhood and of the right to speak and be taken seriously.

I am amazed when I sit in the doctor's office and hear the meaningless conversation in the halls, everyone pitched up in high heels and business suits, clicking along in a great hurry

to go nowhere. We are supposed to be the ones "out of touch" with reality, and the daily superficialities of the nurses and doctors are taken to be what is real. My God, help us in this inversion of values, and the failure of real meeting.

With my love of solitude and silence, and communion with animals and plants, I may be out of place in the extroverted society that proclaims itself the norm. I live in a log house in the forest, open to the vastness of the land around me. No telephone, no electricity – just a man and a cat. I always experience culture shock on re-entering society.

Strange? Eccentric? Abnormally preoccupied with myself? Out of touch with reality? No. One's nature is one's vocation. So my needs for silence, for solitude, and for occasional deep friendships shape my life.

This I would say to the medical profession: don't try to change me. Understand me. And extend the same simple humanity to others whom you have labeled "schizophrenic." We are merely exploring some other level of the reality you have become accustomed to regard as ordinary.