

# SCHIZOPHRENIA

I am not a psychoanalyst, neither am I a behaviourist. However, I believe that incorporating these particular mindsets will provide a better understanding around what I'm about to share with you.

During my primary education I was a dedicated student with high potential, especially within the scope of subjects related to science.

This changed dramatically during fourth grade. During this period of my life, I started hearing a female voice encouraging me to deliberately engage in activities that would get me into significant trouble. I became anxious and perpetually confused without a safe outlet. I found myself isolated, without anyone to safely share my experiences with.

I convinced myself not to share what I was going through, in fear of possible rejection and being unfairly judged. I was afraid and embarrassed. I truly thought I was the only person in the world who heard such voices.

Ultimately hiding my own personal trauma became my downfall. In my effort to appear unaffected, I ended up displaying unusual behaviour compared to my peers. I remember vividly being caught out by a teacher during an episode that involved me talking to the classroom walls.

This was made substantially worse by the berating and humiliation, intentional or unintentional, I would receive from other students – people I considered my friends.

My academic performance plummeted. I felt alone, without anyone to turn to.

Thankfully, my class teacher who had noticed my irregular behaviour made the decision to meet with my mum. Although I wasn't privy to that conversation, afterwards my mum and I had a one on one talk.

I made the decision to tell the truth, to let go of the

embarrassment and was honest with my mother.

Her reaction to my admission was understandable, but confusing nonetheless. She was shaken, worried and confused. I understood, because I felt the same emotions, but I can't say that the theories of being possessed or bewitched didn't hurt. I already felt isolated, so this didn't help.

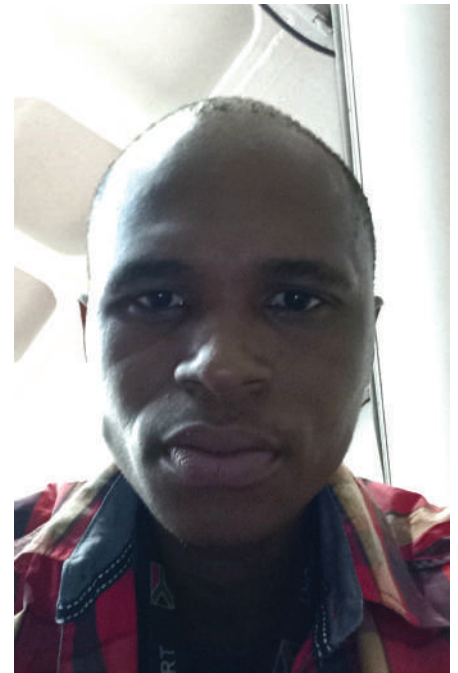
I went along uneasily with the proposed traditional treatment plans of consulting a sangoma, and then a pastor, because at that age with very little access to information, I knew no other alternative but to trust my elders.

Traditional and religious intervention did not prevail. The hallucinations persisted, creating further negative impact for me in class. My teacher became worried and referred the matter to a colleague. More discussions ensued and it was recommended that I attend a special needs school. At that time, it was suspected that I suffered from ADHD, although there was no official diagnosis.

Following their recommendations, I was enrolled into such a school. However, various IQ tests established that indeed, I didn't have a learning disability, and I found myself being transferred back to a normal secular school. Again this didn't quell the hallucinations or improve my behaviour.

The unfortunate tipping point came when I tried to end my life. Suddenly, I was thrust into a psychiatric ward of a hospital for two months. I left, medicated and without knowing my diagnosis – but I left nonetheless, free from hallucinations for the first time in a long time.

I began to excel in my personal and academic life. I became a high achiever at school. But soon followed the downfall. Following my newfound freedom, I began



By Ntetheleo Cebekhulu

indulging in alcohol. I became complacent when it came to taking my medication. I thought I was in control, but that was far from the reality of my diagnosis.

I found myself admitted back into hospital, my freedom gone, and the hallucinations back in full force. After a difficult month of stabilisation in hospital, the diagnosis was shared with me. I was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and entered a lengthy treatment plan. After a while, I began to reap the benefits of such a treatment plan. My mood and concentration levels drastically improved.

I found the diagnosis compelling, even intriguing. Understanding the human mind and its lack of limitations was a wonder to me. I knew this was something I would pursue. I went on to complete my first year at university, majoring in psychology.

My story doesn't end there, it continues to write itself. Complacency reared its ugly head again. The cloud of alcohol hung low over my life. The disease, left unchecked, became debilitating,

leaving me unable to make even the simplest of decisions. Once again, I was admitted, this time as an involuntary patient. This time I refused to comply with the recommendations or the script, to my own downfall. This lasted for a while.

However during my stay in hospital, I was blessed to find a long-lasting friendship with a fellow patient, who was going through a deep depression. We developed a close bond, he became a close confidant, someone who didn't judge me by the stigma of a disease but who saw great value in me, even when I couldn't see it myself. We gave each other support by uplifting each other in dark times. It was a relief to find a friend that understood who I was, and didn't judge me unfairly. We continue to support each other, and even our families share a close bond.

To be clear, I was not failed in any capacity by health officials. They gave me the tools to help myself. However, the experience has highlighted the importance of embracing our mental health, of not being ashamed of it. There

is tremendous value in having an outlet, whether that is via a supportive inner circle, or outside intervention such as being open to various treatments including psychiatric and psychological interventions. Traditional methods didn't work for me, because they didn't treat the root of the problem. Many times, I was made to feel like I was the problem. I was ostracised and felt let down. The path I've chosen has given me the understanding to know that this disease is separate to who I am. It can be controlled, it can be conquered but I have to take charge of my own life and be the maker of my own path.

Much more is needed in terms of educating our communities. Children should never experience what I experienced, and the sad reality is that despite all the advances in technology and social interaction making the world a smaller place, we're still found lacking in making these resources for help available to our younger generation.

When it comes to mental health, making professional avenues of help available to all those in need

within our communities should be prioritised. Traditional remedies will always have a place in our communities, but they should never supersede acquiring professional help. Psychiatric intervention saved my life and gave me my identity back.

Delving into the ideologies of behaviorism, and psychoanalytics, I find myself wavering on the side of psychoanalytics. Indeed I allowed my community to choose my identity, rather than embracing who I was. Ultimately, I had to seek help and find the courage to be who I am, without shame, without doubt and without guilt.

In the end, I am who I am, because I choose to be. In the eternal words of Carl Jung, the first half of life has no meaning, what is important is to be aware of aspects of self that have been neglected. For myself, I see the improvement in my mental health every day.

That is not to say that the hallucinations won't come back but be assured that should they come back, I now have the tools to conquer this fight. **MHM**

