



Leave My Stuff Alone!  
A Story for  
Young & Pre-Teen Siblings



**WORLD FELLOWSHIP FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA  
AND ALLIED DISORDERS**

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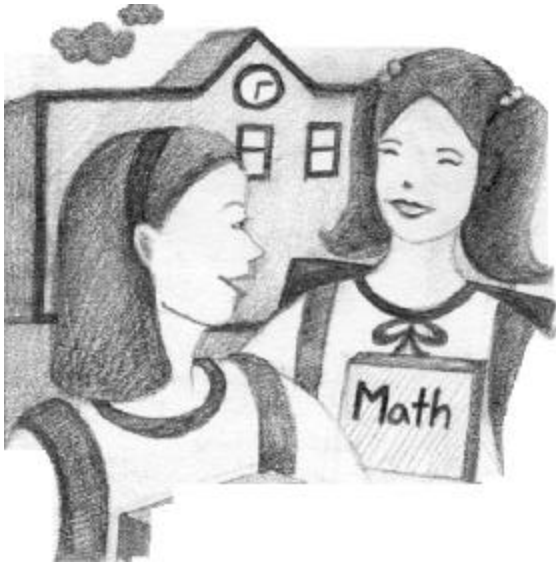
“Leave my stuff alone! Don’t go into my room!”

That was the greeting Joan got when she came in the door from school. She had hardly put her books down before he started again, “You’ve been spying on me.”

Joan didn’t know what to say or do. She stood there with her mouth open. Tim’s outburst completely confused her. He was her brother—five years older than her — and they had always had such fun together. Now he always seemed irritated, upset or just plain glum.

What had she done that made him so mad? Had she gone into his room for anything? She couldn’t exactly remember. And she certainly wasn’t “spying” on him. That was a very odd thing to say.

Picking up her books she turned and went into the kitchen. She phoned Barb to ask if she could go over. They could chat and maybe do their homework together.



She told Barb what had happened and Barb thought maybe Tim’s school work was the problem. He would be working hard to make sure he got his

Certificate and maybe that was what was making him bad tempered.

When Joan went home she felt nervous in case Tim was still mad, but he was nowhere to be seen. Mum was home. She was preparing a rice dish for dinner. Tim didn't come down to dinner although Mum called him. He stayed in his room working.

The next day he didn't go to school and he still didn't come out of his room. There had been a lot of odd little things like this happening and you could see that everyone was getting a bit jittery and tense at home.

At last Mum went into his room and found him asleep curled up in a blanket. All around the room there were bits of paper filled with writing. She thought at first these were school work, but when she began to read she could see that this was no ordinary kind of writing – it didn't make much sense and went on sentence after sentence. She knew that something was terribly wrong.

That night when they were all in bed, Joan woke up and could hear Tim walking around the house muttering to himself. She stayed in bed as this made her nervous again, but in the morning she heard Tim





telling Mum that people were talking to him all night long. Mum didn't seem to want to talk to Joan about it but Joan finally said: "I know something is wrong and I would rather know than have everything a sort of mystery."

It was about two weeks later that Mum took Tim to the family doctor because Tim had not been sleeping at night and

he seemed to be having strange ideas about his family. Tim said his thoughts were all jumbled up and wouldn't let him sleep. He was hearing noises in his head and his mother's voice over and over. Dr. Brown thought that these odd symptoms might be caused by Tim's anxiety about the upcoming exams. He said Tim should make sure to get a good night's sleep and suggested that he exercise more to make sure he was really tired —maybe get more involved in sports and to come back to see him in a couple of weeks.

Dr. Brown's advice about exercising didn't seem to have any effect.. Tim kept on having strange thoughts and feelings. He went back to see the doctor with his mother several weeks later.

Dr. Brown welcomed them and suggested that since these feelings were lasting a long time Tim should see a specialist and get treatment for his jumbled thinking. Tim agreed though he felt embarrassed at having to tell people about what was going on. But



mind and the brain.

It is very important that people go to the doctor when they have unusual experiences like Tim had, because getting treatment as early as possible is very important. Tim felt embarrassed and possibly ashamed about his symptoms, but mental illness is no more shameful than any other illness that you might get. People are no longer ashamed of having cancer so why should they be ashamed of having a mental illness?

There are several illnesses in which people are unable to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. Sometimes the fantasy world becomes so real that they believe it is the real world and cannot be persuaded otherwise.

One of these illnesses is called schizophrenia. Schizophrenia can be treated, but quite often people cannot believe that this is happening to them. Fear, disbelief and sometimes the illness itself makes them believe that nothing is wrong. Another illness in which people sometimes experience psychosis is bipolar disorder.

The brothers and sisters of people who develop psychotic illnesses often feel guilty that in some way they have done something that has made their brother or sister ill. But this is not true. Disorders that affect the mind and brain are illnesses like any other. We do not know why some people get cancer or arthritis and the same goes for schizophrenia. Just like cancer or arthritis, we do not know the causes and how to cure them, but we do have treatments that help to reduce the symptoms. So don't blame yourself.

Another thing that sometimes happens is that the family tries to

protect younger brothers and sisters from knowing about the illness. This is not a good idea because you need to learn and understand why things have changed at home.

Signs of illness are called symptoms. Here's what to expect when someone has a psychotic illness like schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder with psychotic symptoms. People may:

- ◇ believe strange things that are not true
- ◇ feel that their friends and family are against them
- ◇ hear strange sounds or voices which seem to come from the out-side world, or see, hear or taste things that are not there
- ◇ have muddled thoughts which confuse them
- ◇ be unable to concentrate or make decisions
- ◇ have mixed up emotions
- ◇ begin to believe they are famous people

but remember that not everyone will have all these symptoms.

Imagine how you might feel if this happened to you. Think how you might react to friends and family. These symptoms would be very worrying and sometimes frightening. So, remember to be helpful and to try to be as understanding as possible to your brother or sister.

There is no doubt that you will feel nervous or upset or worried by the events that are overtaking your family. If your brother or sister who appears to be ill is rude to you, try not to take the

unpleasant comments as a personal attack, since they are the result of illness, not the true opinion of the person saying them.

You should take a bit more care when chatting with your brother or sister, remembering that sometimes s/he has a hard time sorting out his thoughts as well as your conversation. Slow down: avoid talking fast. Talk gently to your brother or sister about the symptoms and listen carefully to the reply. It will help you understand and show that you care.

The earlier that schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are treated the more likely that the person will recover. The longer that these disorders are left without treatment the less likely it is that full recovery will be possible. So remember “Psychotic episodes are bad for your health”<sup>⊗</sup> and do your best to get the person to see a doctor.

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⊗ Ian Chovil - in his educational program for schools in Canada.

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