

# Stitches

BY: STEPHENIE POLLOCK

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When I was five years old my mother developed late-onset schizophrenia. It was devastating to both our family and to the community who supported her. She had always been elegant, classy, beautiful and well-rounded. She was a woman of many talents, and within a year her life drastically changed. After a brief time, a divorce, and extended psychiatric care, I was able to spend time with her again, both supervised and unsupervised. It was great to have my mother back, and even though she was different, I was still able to enjoy her company and learn from her in more ways than I could understand at the time.

One of the things my mother and I shared was our passion for painting. During our visits, she would teach me about the most famous artists and their artistic techniques. One day we came across a three and a half foot canvas, and she told me I should paint “Starry Night” originally done by Vincent Van Gogh. After a few visits, and some wonderful quality time, I finished the painting and she hung it above her couch. Everyone was impressed that I finished this project, and my mother was especially proud.

However, later that year, my mother fell into a very bad episode of psychosis, and took a sharp knife and slashed straight lines down the entire painting, leaving it ruined and full of slash marks. I was devastated when she called to tell me it was the result of a break in. I knew better, and we both cried. Everyone in my family understood how much quality time had been put into the painting, and what it meant to my mother and me. My sister tried to have it re-matted shortly

after, but nothing would do the trick.

As time went by, and all was forgiven, I realized it was time to repair this painting, which still had not been discarded. After a few days of thinking, I decided that, like the doctor I wanted to be, I was going to hand stitch each slash with thick gold thread. When the stitching was finished, the painting took on a whole new light. It looked better, not because it had repeated gold stitching down the slash lines, but because to me it meant that in any bad situation, whether sad, angry,

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depressed, or broken, there is always a way to move through, overcome, or “mend” a problem or wound. I was able to turn my mother’s illness into something positive, as this painting now hangs more beautifully than ever before. It is no longer “Starry Night,” a version copied from Vincent Van Gogh, or a painting ruined by my mother’s attacks of hallucinations and paranoia, but a symbol that no matter what bumps you hit along the road of life, there is always a golden lining and a way to overcome obstacles. I live my life by these ideals and will always remember this story.



SCHIZOPHRENIA  
- STEPHENIE POLLOCK  
INSPIRED BY  
VINCENT VAN GOGH