

My Hearing Voices Experience

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Twenty one years ago I experienced hearing my first voices. As the hearing voices movement was beginning in Holland, across the world in Australia I tackled them on my own, unaware it had dawned on a mental health professional to question the experience and begin to unravel it, to find the keys to unlock and explain in rational terms, the experience of hearing voices. The mental health care treatment I was being delivered, traditional and clinical, was a trauma in itself, so I set out upon my own journey to rationalise it all alone.

I first heard of the Hearing Voices Network only recently, when I began an employed position as a Recovery Mentor in a Psychosocial Rehabilitation Day Program that is innovative, non clinical and believes in recovery. I am involved in co-facilitating a hearing voices group and am glad for this opportunity to explain my journey as it helps clarify my experience so I can share it effectively and reaffirms to me I was on the right track all along.

My first experience of hearing voices happened shortly after a traumatic sexual abusive experience. I was diagnosed with acute psychosis and schizophrenia and hospitalised for four months. I was told I had opened a can of worms and I expected the mental health team in the facility would help me sort them out but was told quite definitely, “No....we will just push the lid back on.” Though experiencing a very bizarre, loud and persistent auditory and visual confusion, I had a level of insight that was sane; my spirit, observing self, intact with it, I was left to sort it out myself....something rational had to be at the base of it I believed. I understood the voices at that time were related to the trauma, sorting through the persistence of the voices which were telling me I needed to be controlled coupled with the psych service dismissing my experience as a lie and their only answer was to medicate, I fumbled my way through ...played the game and eventually was let out. The voices had quietened but I was left very shaky and perplexed.

I haven't heard voices consistently. There have been occasions since, though, that developed when I was under stress. The second experience I can link to the Psychiatrist and Psych nurse whole approach of negating and belittling me. They would tell me “you will never amount to anything, so just get use to it” and “you are a total right off”. The voices I heard related to these messages. They said, “You are nothing but trouble” and comments like that. One day the psych threw his pen down on the desk and said “You are Impossible!!” I said “well you are not listening to me” I would dwell on these comments, break them down to syllables and initially took them on board as reality. “You are nothing **and** nothing but trouble”. Something had to give. My decision was to keep well clear of psych services and got stuck into building myself up. I worked at optimism, positive thinking , setting goals that were achievable - recovering on my own initiative. I read and read books like the self esteem repair and maintenance manual, skills of highly effective people. Lots of reading and action on my part. I refused to accept the voices messages as true without my attentiveness, I would refute them and they subsided. The medication I was taking I believed helped here too.

The next voice hearing experiences were of a spiritual nature. I have been raised Anglican, private Church of England schooling that gave me an awareness and certain

faith in a spiritual realm. As I fathomed for myself, at a time I was attending church for the joy of a friendship that was dear to me and the love and familiarity of the music, I experienced a demonic presence. This I determined was as a result of a need for me to really decide which side of the spiritual force I would commit to being. I chose the good guys!! I had my house exorcised and my spiritual self strengthened. The demonic voices and visual experience was quite a scary time. Black dogs with red eyes that would hiss at me and fly in my face when I tried to sleep. I understood this, not as a coping strategy to cope with a specific trauma as the other episodes had been, but as a spiritual experience.

Some would say a psychotic breakdown in spiritual terms is really a spiritual breakthrough. For me, the early experiences were too bizarre to be an enlightenment of any sort though, as quantum physics acknowledges, the spiritual realm, or aspect, to our human existence is very real. I believe this too.

About 10 years ago I had my labels added to, Psycho effective disorder and depression. I had a change in medication that was positive but now three illnesses!! I have managed to keep myself very well though if under too much stress, I would become unwell. It was like I spun out. I identified it as originating from my forehead. I would become unwell, my mood would drop, I couldn't concentrate on things and I would talk to walls as my daughter said, not to her. It was a few years before I was introduced to chakras, energy centres around the body, and it was suggested to me that I may have "blasted my 3rd eye chakra" and this would explain my "spinning out". I now work with a chakra meditation where I visualise the chakras opening like a lotus flower, energising and cleansing them, and closing each one. I have not had a "spin-out" experience since.

The voices I hear today are more like whispers. So quiet they are only as loud as thoughts themselves but I have a clear sense they originate outside of me. They are of spirit. I have become "well" psychiatrically and in this psychically connected. I have spiritual guides today who communicate very supportive, loving messages that keep me centred on being present, calm and optimistic about life. The study of hearing voices says all voices originate and are part of ones self. That they are all a coping strategy developed to cope with a trauma. For me, the early experiences were true of this, though today I am just spiritually connected.

I share my experience here to give hope to others who hear voices. The whole hearing voices movement and philosophy is a God send. I feel, and have seen, voice hearers improving their relationships with their voices, they become less distressing as they actively take part in the groups and start to apply what has been discovered to actually "work". Enjoy your recovery journey and best wishes.

Taania