

I still work full-time in the IT sector, but I am also taking a small amount of Risperdal. Without Risperdal I am earlier finished with working and can only go on until three in the afternoon. With Risperdal I just work on for the whole day. I am less excitable.

GAVIN YOUNG

Dear Dr Escher,

I hope you don't mind me using your personal email address to greet you ... I just didn't feel that using Intervoice was appropriate in this case. So, good morning from southern Oregon, USA.

Basically, I wanted to thank you and Dr Romme from the deepest place in my heart for the work you do for/with voice hearers. Reading *Accepting Voices* was pivotal in my recovery. I also bought *Making Sense of Voices* some time ago, and look forward to reading it. You and Dr Romme have a very accessible writing style which works for both professionals and lay people. I can't wait to dig deeper into the mystery of voice hearing ...

If I had written you five years ago, you would have encountered a very different person. I was depressed beyond hope, the voices screamed at me 24/7 (I have evil voices) and I had no idea what was wrong with me. I was a tragic figure in a tragic landscape and everybody around me just kept saying, 'Snap out of it!!' as if I could ... despair, ruin, tragedy, no future at all ... I prayed some days that I would die, that God in His/Her mercy would deliver me from this hideous 'thing' through death (although interestingly, I was never suicidal; there was a spark of hope in me even in the worst of times and I never gave up the will to go on living ...).

The first psychiatrist I saw told me I had 'methamphetamine psychosis' and that the voices would go away. Well, they never did. The second psychiatrist I saw put me on three antipsychotics and dismissed me with 'schizo-affective disorder' – a diagnosis I never bought.

It was only after reading about your work and how voices often correlate with trauma that I began to dig deeper. I was in the midst of serious trauma when I began to hear; I also realised I had had a number of traumatic events prior to this one event that I hadn't 'dealt with' properly; they were just buried.

So you see, you and Dr Romme gave me the 'keys to the kingdom' so to speak, and I began to feel empowered again when I realised that how I dealt with the voices was up to me.

Today, I have a fantastic psychiatrist who doesn't dismiss my experiences, but treats them as real, as I do. I currently take only Abilify and have had good results with it (or is it that I'm just getting better and better the further

away from the trauma that I move?).

I still hear today and the voices are as nasty as they ever were, but they're very muted now, easy to ignore, and even easier to joke around with (which infuriates them – it seems they're only happy when I take them seriously and they have me scared to pieces, which is no longer the case, so in a sense, they've lost their jobs! I think of them now as buffoons rather than a serious threat.)

I've also arrived at a place where I consider the voices or 'words' (as I call them now) to be a blessing rather than a curse and this has made all the difference in the world. I have often called them my Greatest Teachers, as the content of what they say has deep meaning for me, inasmuch as it's called to the fore areas that I've kept buried since childhood ... the voices keep me honest about myself. And it was simply a matter of how I chose to react to them.

I also have a diagnosis of Complex PTSD which I can live with and makes perfect sense to me. And the blessings go on: I started my own business; bought a beautiful home; belong to a voice-hearers' group on Yahoo for support and have my West Highland White Terrier, Sprite, to keep me company. I'm also developing a social life, which I thought I'd never have again. Moreover, through CBT, I am gradually working my way back into the world, which feels good, but still scary at times (I'm sure you understand).

The voices stole my self-confidence but I'm gradually getting it back again, because I believe today that I never really lost it to begin with, I just forgot I had it or, put another way, I disowned it and had to reclaim it through putting back together all the dissociated parts of me – it's like a huge jigsaw puzzle called 'MY LIFE'.

I've developed a set of coping tools which I believe to be my salvation. I have you and Dr Romme to thank for that ... you started me on the road back to sanity. If I can share some of that knowledge and hope with other hearers then the whole experience is worth it! In a sense, you've given me a 'gospel' to spread ...

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to read this lengthy and somewhat redundant email (I always get flustered around celebrities <grin>) and please give my best to Dr Romme. You two are my heroes ... thanks again.

Yours sincerely (a real fan),
Gavin Young

... experience of voice-hearing in young people. A section for young people and a

