

My Biography

By Kate Crawford

My voices started earlier than for many. I was just a child when I had my first voices speak to me and being only four years old I didn't really understand what was going on (it is only now that I am gaining some understanding). Being such a young child I didn't realise everyone didn't have the same things going on in their heads. When they first came to me they came to me saying they were my friends and that they would help me, at the time I was suffering physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect, but they never did or could help me. I told my mother I was hearing voices and seeing things, my visions, and she just said it wasn't happening it was just an imaginary friend. I thought Mothers were supposed to protect and love their children, but mine just wanted to hurt me. Why I wondered I loved her with all my heart, but as the abuse expanded to include sexual abuse, by a family friend, she just ignored what was going on. I tried to tell her what he was trying to do with me but she wouldn't believe me and would punish me for lying.

She had many ways of punishing me, for whatever I had supposedly done...though existing seemed to be my worst crime. Locking me in the coal-bunker, with no food or water and sometimes with no clothes. I would sometimes be able to sneak food in beforehand or even sneak out for food if she had unlocked the door while I was sleeping. If I created any fuss I was battered so I learned to go in when I was told to. The only things I had to focus on when locked in there was the lock on the door, the moon which watched over me and the voices in my head. The moon became my friend as I focused on it in my mind and escaped in my imagination; when the bad things were happening, I was sat on the moon in a deck chair and not in my body experiencing the pain. The voices, my so called friends, tried to stop me escaping to the moon, telling me she would catch me and things would be so much worse. They also tried to stop me hiding food in the coal, saying how much trouble I would be in when she found out.

The moon became very important to me, her light showed me where I had hidden the food, meaning I didn't starve. The moon is still very important to me now feeding my love of astronomy and even now giving me something to focus on when times are bad.

At school my oddities went unnoticed. The ongoing abuse was overlooked and I was a loner. Kate was the odd kid who was never allowed to bring anyone home or stay with anyone. I had no friends and no one played with me. The abuse had expanded at home to include my mother holding my head under water while I was in the bath. The bruises she caused me were just added to by the bullies at school who made me believe that all I was on earth for was to be someone's punch-bag. The teachers said and did nothing, seeming not to notice what was going on, not even taking real notice of the fact that my mother had cut off all my hair.

After my mother died, due to an incident when I was running away from her while she was trying to hit me, I was put into a children's home. Rather than this being the escape from a short lifetime full of abuse this opened up other avenues for the world to hurt me. From the age of twelve until I was thirteen I was repeatedly molested, abused,

raped by a member of staff, and forced to perform sexual acts with the other children. I now call this man 'The Alien' as no human being could do such things to a child. He has become the 'top dog' of the chorus of voices in my mind.

Life went on, but not very well after these early years of abuse. One kind of abuser; was exchanged for another as I went to live with my grandmother. I tried to live a so-called normal life, but the things going on in my head were far from normal. Four years later at seventeen she died and I was on my own in the world (as I had always been), in my own world of voices, but at least no one was hurting me now.

My voices took the place of the people who had hurt me over the years. The abuse I had suffered at their hands I now suffered in my mind, as I still do.

I was first hospitalised after being raped, where I was diagnosed with post stress paranoid schizophrenia. The initial reaction was to medicate me, in the belief that the medication would silence the voices. All the medication did for the 28 days that I was sectioned was weaken my resistance to the voices and make me sleepy. On release I was thrown back to the world with no support and a bottle full of pills that were supposed to cure me.

To escape from the person who raped me I moved away from Scotland down to Manchester. It had been explained to me that a prosecution was unlikely due to my mental health issues and I knew I wouldn't be believed if it ever came to court.

Three months after I moved to Manchester the Glasgow police came looking for me, because my Alien had been arrested and was due in court with multiple charges relating to sexual abuse and rape occurring at the children's home I had been in. I was asked to give evidence, but the thought of being in court with The Alien was something I just couldn't face. The police were pretty good, not pressurising me to give evidence and when I was declared mentally unfit to give evidence they left me alone. I did and do not want to know what happened to The Alien because if he did get away with what he did I would blame myself for not testifying. The one thing I did want, an apology from social services for letting this animal do what he did to me, is something that they refused and is unlikely to ever happen.

The stress of these events and the horrors of my past that it dredged up caused me to decline. I was sectioned again and my children were taken into care. The voices worked on this, telling me that my children would go through what I had and it was all my fault. The Alien, my main voice, played on the fact that social services and anyone involved with them wasn't human, but an alien, like him, or someone working with the aliens. I asked a member of staff to talk to me, to try to help me keep some grip on reality as I was being told that the aliens were coming for me too. They said they would, but never came. Because of this I barricaded myself in my room and then the staff did come...they forced their way in, held me down and forcibly injected me...all which could have been avoided with a few minutes talking.

I became like my mother after the injections, I would sit in a chair all day where I was put without a coherent thought in my head. When I was allowed to start coming around from the medication I figured out rather quickly that admitting to hearing the voices and seeing spaceships was not going to get me out. So to get my children back

safe with me I lied through my teeth, telling the psychiatrists exactly what they wanted to hear about how their wonder-drugs were working.

Back with my children Social Services now started insinuating my lack of ability to function, due to the medication was neglect and if I talked about the things that were troubling me, what the voices were saying, it was emotional abuse. The only person who seemed to be on my side was my Health Visitor who was the first person who pointed me towards the Hearing Voices Network. She was the first person who listened and tried to understand. Unlike Social Services she didn't fixate on the state of the house and she understood that the medication left me in a state where even when I had the motivation, I just didn't have the ability. Taking large amounts of medication made it impossible for me to be an effective mother, especially as a single mother.

Within the Hearing Voices Network I found for the first time in my life a group of people who actually understood what I was talking about and who believed me. Through shared experiences they helped me formulate my own coping strategies; gave me an understanding of what the voices could mean and tried to focus on the positives of hearing voices. One of the first tasks was to try and put names to the voices. Without names there is the fear of the unknown, with names they might still be there abusing me, but that fear is lessened.

The voices had convinced me that everything that had happened to me was my fault. I deserved to be beaten, starved, half drowned with my head down the toilet. The apparent affection and attention which had been shown whilst I was being sexually abused was something I had craved, never having had attention in a positive way. So the voices worked on the fact that I must have sought out the sexual side too and involuntary responses to the sexual situations just proved I was a whore, slag...or worse and they kept reminding me of this every day. Hearing Voices Network helped me realise that though I might carry the guilt, that guilt was misplaced. I was the victim rather than the one at fault and that the voices were just working on my deepest fears, going for the pound of flesh closest to my heart.

The voices tend to take the form that we are most susceptible to. If you are a religious person perhaps they might take the form of god or the devil. Perhaps a family member who was (or is) important to you might be a way of getting you to listen to everything that they say and believe what they say. In my case they take the form of aliens and only through listening to them, and no one else, can I protect my family. They work on my weaknesses, they are part of me and know everything I know, dredging up memories, thoughts and sensations I would have liked to forget long ago. Left alone with them, without support, I relive the worst moments of my past again and again, night after night.

Now with the support of the friends I have made at the Hearing Voices Network, I know I don't have to be alone with the voices; they have allowed me to reclaim my life. It is not a cure, there is no cure for hearing voices and it is not something that needs to be cured. It is what those voices say that we as voice hearers have to try to interpret. Not all that they say is bad, they can be messages from our subconscious saying all is not well, they can tell us that we have to do something before we break. It is when we are scared to discuss what is going on in our heads, when we live alone with them that their more destructive potential can be unleashed.

Once I was so medicated that I could barely stay awake through the day. Now five days a week I am out as a voluntary worker with the Hearing Voices Network. I facilitate groups in and out of hospitals, I train professionals and do workshops and visit universities trying to educate the next generation of professionals in a more empathic approach. So long ago it wouldn't have seemed possible for my life to have purpose, direction and meaning...now I work one to one with people in the state I once was and now as The Hearing Voices Network goes international I am showing people over Europe how to claim their lives back.

I am no longer alone...