

In the Garden of Eden: The Content of My Psychoses

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Introduction

I was working as an assistant professor in the working group on Philanthropy at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, active in foreign policy for the Dutch Labour Party, and as an advisor for an endowment on microcredits, when I first became suspicious. My husband and I in 2005 were on a holiday in Cuba when we met a young British man of our age traveling alone. He accompanied us and asked me questions like: “Did you watch that movie on the hotel TV with gay men?, What do you think of gays?” and “Can you tell me where Boston is?” I felt I was being tested, and assumed that he was working for the secret service in order to determine if I was suitable to fill a position in Dutch national politics. I did not discuss this with my husband, maybe because these ideas played a role subconsciously or maybe because I realized somehow that they were strange. They were the beginning of the most difficult 10-year episode of my life. I had several psychoses. In this article, I will focus on the content of my psychoses in 2006 and 2009. I hope that sharing my experiences helps to provide insight in what one can experience when going through an episode of psychosis.

2006

In 2006, my son was born. He was a lovely baby and I enjoyed having a family. Nevertheless, the delivery was hard, and so was the breastfeeding. I wanted to be a perfect mother, did not get a lot of sleep, worked hard to become a full professor, was a member of the national manifesto committee of the Dutch Labour Party, and an advisor of the endowment of microcredits. It was a

Note: I have added some details to the story that I remember, but were not mentioned in my Dutch book about this period “Een Ongeluk in Mijn Hoofd” (2010).

¹ On the other hand, later on there were periods where I was not busy at all, but I got ill as well. My father also said: “I work very hard as well, but I do not get ill.”

very beautiful but also a very busy period for me.¹ When I attended a national symposium of the Dutch Labour Party, I had the feeling again that I was tested. The politicians seemed like actors to me, as if they were playing a performance in order to test how I would react. Just after that symposium we went on a holiday to South Africa with friends of my husband, a couple. The man of the couple picked the date of our holiday, so I reasoned that he belonged to the secret service. His wife probably assisted him. I do not remember if it was this holiday, or another, but I remember that I had enormous difficulties with packing my suitcase. I just could not concentrate and did not have the energy for it. My husband did it for me.

When we arrived in Summerset West, South Africa, the forests caught fire. I thought that our friends were there to register my reaction to that event. I was not scared of the fire, and I assumed that it was part of the training. My son was given a green alarm clock by the husband of my mother, and I was convinced that the husband of my mother belonged to the secret service too. It was the duty of my husband and I to handle the fire properly. The secret service would land with a helicopter to pick up our son and rescue him if necessary. I also had the idea that we needed to stay in the house, which is unusual because I do normally try to avoid dangerous situations. Luckily, my husband and friends insisted on moving to a safe area. The fire destroyed lots of land and the flames came close to our cabin. Our friend and I said to each other lightly “just a fire” and “wanna beer?” Later on, he pointed a statue of a black panther out to me. “Look, a black panther. They are rare” he said. I thought that he meant that I was a black panther. I had in mind that it was the highest position at the secret service.

When we returned home I had the idea that the news contained special messages for me. For example, I was reading about babies in hospitals with inexplicable broken legs. I thought that the perpetrator wanted to attack the babies in our local hospital, if I did not obey. I asked the

handyman if he could phone the local hospital to warn against intruders who broke babies' legs. Also, Colors of people's clothes also contained special meaning for me. For instance, if there was a guy in a red blouse, I associated that with safety. The color "orange" symbolized the Dutch royal family and "black" symbolized a panther. When I saw trucks driving on the road with the family name of the political leader of the Dutch Labour Party, I thought that he encouraged me and cooperated with the Dutch secret service. I also found it sometimes hard to make a decision led by my heart. I needed to rely on my cognitive skills in order to determine what was right and what was wrong. However, I felt that I could not become a politician if I could not listen to my heart.

My husband and I planned to buy a camper. We went to the house of his parents because they would accompany us. I did not want to go out of their house because I felt so scared. They went away and I was alone in their house. There were helicopters circling around in the neighborhood. I was convinced that the helicopters would bombard the house. I was petrified. I sat down on the floor in the middle of the room with my hands on my head and waited until my husband returned.

After a while my husband realized that something was terribly wrong with me and he took me to the general practitioner. She advised me to go to a clinic where I got antipsychotics from the psychiatrist. The first time I took the pill I felt as if there was a little explosion in my head. I got dizzy and laid down in bed immediately. I had trouble getting up in the morning, something that I was not used to. I could not read, so I could not do my academic work. The professor and chair of our working group noticed that I was ill and asked if I wanted to stay home. However, I felt so ashamed of my situation that I had difficulties talking about it. Moreover, because I did not lie in bed the whole day, I did not consider myself to be ill.

The side effects of the medicines made it hard for me to take them. My first psychiatrist and I had a different view of my suffering. It seemed to me as if she thought that I just did not like the idea of taking pills, but I did not want to take them because they made me feel depressed, gain weight, and lose energy. Nevertheless, we agreed that I would stop with my medicines. I asked "How do I stop?" She answered, "Just stop taking them, cold turkey." I felt the symptoms reoccurring. I was afraid to tell her, because I feared that I would have to take the medicines and suffer from the side effects again.

2009

In 2009, when my son was 3 years old, I had to be hospitalized because of the psychosis that followed when I stopped taking my medicines. I felt watched continuously and had the idea that there were cameras installed in our house to observe my behavior. I had the temperature very cold, could not stand loud music or the TV, did

not sleep for 2 weeks, and I had to vomit a lot because of the continuous stress I experienced. When I told people that I did not sleep, they said "Oh, then you must be tired, so you will probably fall asleep soon tonight." But that just did not happen, my energy was burning my body and I did not realize how bad it was if you do not sleep. My sister had problems with her health, and I thought that I was also tested to see how I would react to that.

When I saw a man in the national newspaper, whom I knew, I had the idea that I should fall in love with him in order to create a more peaceful world. I assumed that he belonged to the secret service as well. The idea that I should fall in love with him made me vomit a lot of times. I was happily married, so happy with our family, and faithful. When a trauma helicopter landed close to our house with a lot of people watching it, I thought that the message was that society desperately needed me and that people were suffering. I decided to leave my husband and 3-year-old son and went to my father's house.

In the evenings, I had the idea that I was trained by the secret service and drank a lot of water. Every time I drank a glass of water I knew that the secret service could poison me, but I had to be brave. Being a panther, I was convinced that I was very tough. And, belonging to the secret service, I knew that I had to operate in silence. That is why I did not communicate with my father and sister anymore. When I started smashing glasses on the ground, my sister called the police. Two agents came, a man and a woman. The policeman looked at me with his eyes wide open. I thought that that was a sign that I should attack him like a panther. I started growling loudly and jumped on him. The police woman was shocked and said "Just a tiger." For a split second, I thought that it was a big mistake that I had attacked the policeman. The police is your best friend.² When I was at high school I had interest in becoming a police officer myself. But the voice in my head just repeated: "Attack!" And so I did.

The policeman put handcuffs on me and brought me to a cell. In the cell I felt mainly tough, and I thought that in order to save humanity I had to fight for it. There was a small part of me that felt deeply humiliated because I always used to be so good and now look at me, I was locked up in a police cell. Maybe I also realized at that moment that there was no way back to the life I lived before. After a while they put me on a stretcher and I was brought by ambulance to the hospital.

I communicated with the secret service via the mirror. One night the secret service told me that I should prepare myself to die. I had to drink the water from the tap to see if it was poisoned. I took five gulps and went to bed. Suddenly, I felt the energy of God at the right corner of the door. He asked "You are prepared to die for the good cause?" "How do you mean?" I asked. I was

² In the Netherlands, "police violence" is not such an issue and hot topic as it is nowadays in the United States. "The police is your best friend" was a slogan of the Dutch police for many years.

petrified, I did not believe in God until then. “Every time you had to choose between life or death you choose to die if necessary.” “Yes” I said dazedly. We talked the whole night and Christus introduced me to the garden of Eden. We walked the whole night back and forth in my hospital room. He showed me a peaceful lion. I did not understand why God came to me. I am an ordinary girl who grew up in Berkel en Rodenrijs, close to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. I asked via telepathy something like: “Maybe you can better go to president Obama?”

After I met Christus, the music teacher of the hospital came and played the song “White Light” of a Dutch singer Marco Borsato. I was astonished, because the song symbolized my meeting with Christus. I danced to it and bought more CDs. I had never bought many CDs in my life, now I did. I connected the song “Summer in the City” of Joe Cocker with president Obama and a relaxed life. I walked across my room like I was walking on a summer day in New York City. “License to kill” reminded me of president Putin. “Ghetto” of Elvis Presley was also an important song for me although I had never listened to Elvis Presley before I got ill. Now, I had the feeling that we were soul mates. I felt his loneliness and a deep pain and compassion for the mother in the Ghetto with her baby she could not feed. With tears rolling over my cheeks, I danced to his song.

A few days later I had contact with Ramona from planet Mars. She said that she and her husband Peter would attack Planet Earth if Christus, my fellow secret agent, and I did not show up. But I did not know how to contact them. In order to try to save the world I threw my mobile phone out through the window. My finger started to bleed. Because they still said that they were going to

attack the earth, I tried to smash a chair through the glass. I was convinced that fresh air would save us. I ended up in the isolation room. One night, the light was still on and the bell to ring the nurses did not work, so I could not sleep. The door was so thick and I could not get out. I thought the earth would perish with me in the isolation room away from my son and other loved ones. In the morning, Ramona told me it was a joke.

After I received forced medication I did not talk to God anymore, and I realized that I was not in love with another secret agent. I immediately called my husband to say that I was out of my psychosis. I was longing to see him. He visited me a couple of times. A few days later, when I was still in forced hospitalization, he said, that he wanted to divorce. It hurt me a lot. However, because I was already in shock of what happened to me, I could hardly cry. I said that I wanted to stay with him, but I could not fight for our family, because I was too weak. I could only mention that I did not want to divorce, and that I saved his life when he got altitude sickness when we were climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. He just replied that this was different. The doctors were saying to my husband that they knew that I loved him and my son very much. I was happy that they said that, although it did not help. A few days later he mentioned that he had taken my stuff out of the house and stored it in storage rooms. I was ill, in a hospital and homeless. I was too ill and weak to cry or get angry. I just adjusted to what happened to me and slept on the weekends alternating at my sister’s, father’s, and mother’s homes. At that moment, I was luckily not aware of the fact that I was only a third³ of the way through the most difficult period of my life

³ To be more precise, it was 3/8.