

## Surviving the Voices

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Most people living with schizophrenia have a grandiose voice or voices which feed their delusions—mixing some parts of reality and some parts of fantasy. When a patient becomes stable he/she learns to check the evidence in determining whether or not the delusion is real. It is like checking for rainbows after a storm, or finally seeing light in a dark place. The grandiose voice comes from that mixture of a person's genetics and life experiences.

For example, one might have a grandiose idea that he is a boxer. Maybe from watching *Rocky* movies or highlights of Muhammad Ali fights. These experiences might lead the person with untreated schizophrenia to believe he is a boxer. This grandiose idea, not based in reality, could have a disastrous ending. When my own schizophrenia wasn't treated, I had this same grandiose idea which put me on the losing end of a fight with a golden gloves champion. I was not on my medication, and actually thought I was a trained boxer. Once treated with the proper medication, it becomes easier to distinguish between such extreme ideas.

Another voice which I hear is more like commentary of what I am doing. Kind of like in the special features explanation on a DVD or watching a sporting event on TV. For example, I might be in my bathroom brushing my teeth, and then I hear, "He is brushing his teeth. Then he spits." The voices is a running commentary of everyday activities that I might be doing. This voice is heard like a conversation in front of me, only I am alone. I push through, or listen to the beat of a song to ignore it.

Sometimes I hear voices at night before I go to bed. This voice might be telling me that there is someone outside my front door, or there is someone messing with my car in the parking lot. When this happens I have learned to check the evidence to reassure myself by looking through my front door's peep hole, or even opening my front door to find nothing and no one is there. I have a balcony that overlooks the parking lot, so I can look out to be sure my car is okay.

Some people with schizophrenia isolate themselves or become reclusive. I have to work at not doing this. I always try to greet my neighbors when I see them walking in the parking lot. A simple, "How are you?" can help me realize that the voice telling me that they are talking about me, may just be a voice in my head, and not real. I want my neighbors to see me as a nice, friendly guy. I am learning to check the evidence when the voices are telling me something negative.

Even though I take my medication regularly, I still hear some voices. The difference is most of the time I can manage them. I can get engaged in something else to block them out such as going for a walk. I have also learned that if the voices are getting really negative, I can call someone in my support system, perhaps my parents, and talk to them about what the voices are saying. My parents can also help me think through the lack of evidence.

I don't know if a person with schizophrenia can ever be totally free of voices, but it is possible to survive the voices and lead a much more normal life, even with them playing in the background of your life.