

We all hear voices

We all hear voices, here is a poem called 'Getting Out of Jail' I wrote in Australia at the International hearing voices event (look out for next years World Congress on Hearing Voices in Maastricht in September). Below the poem is an explanatory text behind the idea that in a way we all hear voices.

Getting Out of Jail

I have many voices,
As do we all.
I have many choices,
To make as I am multidimensional.
I have a peacemaker,
But also my Grandfathers' rage
I do not know why
Maybe I should ask a sage.
I have a needy part,
That I sometimes look down upon.
I have a greedy part,
That likes Jam, cream and scones.

We live in a system that exploits and manipulates
A part of me wants to do this too,
I've tried to keep him fairly quiet,
I once tried to lock him in the Zoo!

I have a naïve part that is trusting and is kind,
It gets me into trouble,
Not knowing where to draw the line.
I have a competitor,
That wants to win the race.
It works well with the jealous part,
If I don't get first or second place!

I have a dancer and a singer and an artist and a spy,
They help me express my emotion,
Except the last one who can lie!
I have a know it all professional,
Who I send away on missions
I have a vulnerable part
I used to silence with derision.

I have a part that believes
We are all born good and equal,
And I have a part that avoids emotion
And then gets me stuck in treacle.

Now I've got a boxer
Who I think I should treat well,
He helps me express agitation
And after that I sleep well.

I have a part that tries to ground me
In the here and now,
And reads about spirituality
So I don't get in too many rows!

I have a peace enthusiast
Who wants to increase (truth and) understanding,
So I must learn to listen deeply
To this profound yearning.

I have a part that likes to show off

I don't know if you've noticed,
And I also have a rebel
But Now I think I should close this.
So thank you very much
For giving the time to listen,
Getting to know our selves better
Can help unlock our inner prison

Rufus May, Nov 2008

We All Hear Voices

Do we? yes we do! But hearing voices is considered a 1st rank symptom of Schizophrenia, is it not? Well yes it is considered that and I will talk about schizophrenia labels another time. But while hearing voices is one of the most feared experiences in our society, I'd like to suggest that we all hear voices. Perhaps not as amplified or as intrusive as classic hearing voices but nevertheless different parts of ourselves are constantly talking to us. Phrases like 'being single-minded' and 'being of one mind' are deceiving. We all have many personalities. Often they argue in our minds and compete for attention. Also we are all different in different situations. For example, when I'm on the football pitch you will see a very different Rufus (aggressive - nick named 'psycho'!) to the one who sits in a team meeting (thoughtful, professional) or who visits his elderly relatives (caring and kind).

There's a saying on an American greetings card that says 'Inside me there's a skinny women crying to get out normally I can shut her up with cookies'. A lot of women might relate to this concept, I know my partner Rebecca does. I use a technique called Voice dialogue to interview different sub-personalities like the skinny woman within, using different chairs. I used it the other day to help an up and coming actor understand where his self doubt was coming from. After talking to several parts of him we spoke to a guardian angel who told us about a bullying incident that had rocked his confidence and made him always want to fit in. It was this part that was stopping him taking on bigger acting jobs.

Some examples of inner personalities many of us have are the carer who looks after others, the perfectionist who always wants to be the best, the pleaser who likes to keep everybody happy, the joker who entertains and the critic who in small doses can help us improve our performance.

We don't want to get rid of our many voices rather develop a stronger awareness of their strengths and limitations, so we can choose which parts of ourselves to listen to in different situations. Meditation is one way we can step back from our busy minds and watch without judgment the drama the different parts of our minds orchestrate.

In our society our inner child has often become buried in our desire to fit in to the adult world. In fact there are at least three inner children, the playful child, the vulnerable child and the imaginative child. But we ignore them at our peril. They have valuable energies that can enhance how we relate to the world. The vulnerable child allows us to become intimate with others, to sense their needs and our own. The playful child can help with creativity making our life more fun and help with problem solving. The imaginative child similarly allows us to dream to invent new possibilities, to change how we see the world. When you get a spare moment write down a few of your own sub-personalities. Remember none of them are bad, they all have their uses, if we have a healthy dialogue with them. And we can develop new ones. I recommend the book 'Voice dialogue: The manual' by Hal and Sidra Stone - for more information about the voice dialogue approach (see the resources section).