

## To See With Closed Eyes

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I have always had this feeling that there was something deviating from the norm or different about me. As a child, I had a distinct feeling that my parents were not my parents. I was sure that I was adopted. Looking at my parents, I could not see myself in them. Back then, I did not like talking and especially to my parents. Not because I did not like them, but I was very aware that what I had inside of me, I could not talk to anyone about. I felt that I had another way of being in the world than the one I saw around me. I was seeing it with different eyes.

I could not recognize myself in other children. I was quiet and thought a lot about things, and I was wondering why other children could be happy all the time. I really did not understand it. I could not just play. I evaluated everything I was doing, repeatedly thinking it through looking at it from every angle, analyzing and dissecting it: Could it really be true? Afterward, I had to write it down in order to be sure that what I had experienced was true. If I wrote it down, it also proved that I was alive; that I was a real human being. I was often doubtful of this; this, to be alive, I did not really understand. I often felt that I was dead. My body felt deformed and useless as if it was not really there. Only my head, the thoughts, and the voices felt real.

I have lived with voices for as long as I can remember; they were always talking to me. I might have been 5–6 years old when I started noticing them. I have never thought much about the thing with the voices; it has always been normal to me. I was actually convinced that everybody heard voices. I was sure that I could hear everybody's thoughts and that they could hear mine. That all the voices belonged to a collective whole, which was talking to me, and telling me what I should do and think. It was only in the beginning of my 20s, when I got my diagnosis, that I found out that others did not hear voices.

I only remember books, books, and more books from my childhood and teenage years. I read whenever I was able to. I felt best when immersed in a book and alone in my room. If I was not reading, I could get confused

about who I was. I put everything that was me into the books. When I finished a book, I felt as if I dissolved, as if I disappeared out into the room, but if I just held on to a book, then I did not disappear. Within, I had this basic feeling of loneliness and total isolation from the surrounding world. I had a thing about counting stuff. I would count all my pencils, sort them according to color, and then count them again because everything depended on the colors; how many times I should count. If the pencil, eg, was red and the next one blue, they should be counted 200 times anew. If the color combination was different, they might have to be counted 400 times. I also paced out my room every day, so I knew how long, wide, and high the room was. This was crucial in case I was fragmented, so I could pull the pieces and myself together.

If we were to have guests over at home, I felt intense discomfort. I felt ill well before, and I would physically throw up. The very thought that I could not foresee what the guests would say, how they would behave, scared me. I played out all possible scenarios in my head about how they would behave, what they would do, and what they would say. I wished that I could foresee what they would do from they arrived until they left. It felt a need to be prepared, and since I was not able to be prepared, I became ill. I remember my time in school as something that had to be ended. I could not sit still in class; I interrupted and consequently spent a lot of my time outside of the classroom because I asked too many questions. I wanted to know everything: why pi was pi, why the color green was the color green, and why a square was 4-sided. My time in school was also marked by fits of rage. If I became frustrated, I saw red, throwing with tables, chairs, and school bags. Afterward, I did not remember much apart from a feeling of shame. I also often ended up in fights. For some reason, I always said the wrong thing. I could never really figure out what to say to other people, neither as a child or teenager. I was always awry in social contexts, which meant that my circle of friends was non-existing.

When I was 8 years old, I began dancing and, in many ways, I felt that it was my salvation. In dance, I could express myself with the body without having to say anything. I became aware of my own body and other's bodies, which I felt was connected by threads reaching out into the room. I did, however, always have a quiet feeling of not being fully awake, as if I always walked around in a state of dreaming and being half awake. Often it required a great effort to move myself out into reality, like when I had to be attentive in school or be present with the people around me. At the same time, I had this feeling of standing next to myself and looking at myself from the outside. It often happened when I was playing or being with people. Inside my head, I observed and commented on what I was doing: "now she is lifting her arm", "now she is eating," and "now she is playing with sand." My body felt like it was outside myself because I could not feel it. It was alien to me like a mysterious, strange object. The only time I felt that I was alive was when I danced.

Turning older, I have a growing feeling that I am changing as a human being and turning into something different, something non-human. In my reality, I have always felt that I have operated with several different worlds and that these worlds have been running at the same time: The real world that had to do with my outer life, school and family and a world that was my own, a completely private, subjective world. A world that nobody knew about but me. For me, it has always been my subjective world that took up most space; it has been normal for me. Reality has always felt like an odd concept. Any time, I would escape into my fantasy world, where I feel safe.

This is where the voices and the feeling of normality are greatest. Since I was a child, I have had to negotiate between the 2 worlds, to live in both of them and have them inter-connect at the same time. The 2 worlds have often collided and created problems for me because I had to address something in reality while actually being wrapped up in the inner world.

My thoughts are always fast-paced and come in a state of total disorder. The voices lie across, so it is difficult to hear the thoughts. It feels like the thoughts are being sucked out from the back of my head, leaving only the voices talking. Feeling that I have a fundamentally different way of seeing and being in the world, has followed me all my life. I feel that I am never myself, because what kind of a "self" does it refer to? I feel that I have several. That my self is fragmented. Every morning when I wake up, I have to put together the pieces, which are me, like a jigsaw, to reach apparent normality. Still, it only feels like apparent normality. I have had schizophrenia as a constant companion all my life. No matter how well my outer life is with friends, work, family, I have this part of me, schizophrenia, demanding attention. I never feel well inside. I feel my core is unstable, and I have always had this feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness. I also have this feeling of complete and absolute isolation inside myself.

I am 46 years old today, and I do not believe in the word "recovery," but I believe in coexistence as a condition for life. I coexist with schizophrenia, and it is as big a part of my identity, as part of me dealing with the outer world. The 2 worlds have to collaborate for me to be "me" whatever this "me" may be.