



Learning from the Voices in My Head

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Eleanor Longden was a college freshman when she started hearing voices in her head. Diagnosed with schizophrenia and checked into a psychiatric ward, Longden spent years trapped in a nightmare of hospitals and medications, pain and despair. Yet she survived. Her technique: to learn to listen to her internal narrators, not reject them. Now on the cusp of finishing her Ph.D. in psychology, Longden still hears voices — and she says she wouldn't live without them.

Part personal memoir and part medical argument, *Learning from the Voices in My Head* challenges society's definition of crazy. Longden calls for a new, nuanced understanding of voice hearing and urges us to see madness not as a condition, but as a process — one through which those who struggle with mental health issues have the chance to emerge with their sanity intact. Longden's story shows that there is, in the end, a message in the madness.

Learning from the Voices in My Head Details

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Ruby says

AMAZING book. I could not put it down. In fact, i woke up in the night last night and couldn't help but have a sneaky read until it was finished. I saw a TED talk by its author, Eleanor Longden, who hears voices herself. Diagnosed with schizophrenia, she went through a mental health system that essentially consigned her to the scrap heap and told her that her condition would only degenerate. Shunned by her friends and taunted by her peers, she isolated herself and resigned herself to a life without hope.

These days, she still hears voices, but she has made peace with them. She no longer touches medication. After taking an award for achieving the highest ever score for science, she is now a psychiatrist herself, but unlike most psychiatrists, she believes that hearing voices is a response to trauma and should be treated through therapy. She believes not everyone who hears voices should be taking medication. She is an amazing, big hearted woman, and now officially my new hero.

She also says trauma is a social and political problem. "By placing the causes of distress on the individual and not her context, our culture fails to look at what external factors are creating this distress," she writes.

"So, for example, in the U.K. we have newspaper headlines proclaiming that "depression and anxiety are the biggest cause of misery in Britain," in which nebulous psychiatric concepts are given causal precedence rather than the numerous social contexts that give rise to unhappiness."

These days, she has joined a worldwide social movement, the Hearing Voices Network, which offers hope and empowerment to people who hear voices. In addition to fighting stigma, the network encourages those who are open to it to consider their voices as aspects of themselves they need to confront and make peace with. I had no idea that such an organisation existed.

Although I do not hear voices myself, I do have my own mental illness, and this book was absolutely revolutionary and life-changing. I feel hope, and like i am ready to approach my experiences in a whole new way. I have barely done it justice. Absolutely INCREDIBLE.

D Lynn says

Life Changing Book for Sufferers

I am someone who has heard voices from the age of twelve. This book brought tears to my eyes with the knowledge that I was not alone, that I didn't have to think of myself as crazy, and that hearing voices was nothing to be ashamed of. It also empowered me to know that there is an entire movement dedicated to these unique and precious people.

Demi Purdy says

This book is the autobiography of a woman who was diagnosed with schizophrenia in college. She talks

about how the voices originated and later went into psychiatry and then mental hospitals after making the mistake of telling her friend about it. She went as far as harming herself by burning her arms with cigarettes and lighters as well as putting chemicals on her arm. Her condition with schizophrenia was very serious, but after meeting with Dr. Pat Bracken and his team, she learned to listen to those voices and manage to recover from a serious case. While this is an autobiography, this would also fall under non-fiction as it is a true story and she also gives more of an insight on schizophrenia. I gave it this rating because it gives good information on schizophrenia, or "voice hearing" as she calls it, and is highly suggested for those going into psychology whether they're in high school or college.

Patricia Morais says

This is a truly inspiring story of someone who has learnt how to live with schizophrenia and who, after a dark period, rather than perceiving it as a mental disturbance, started accepting it as an emotional response to some traumatic events. Longden understood the difference between "hearing voices" and listening to them, and started believing they had compelling information that could answer some of her most dark emotions and unresolved issues.

The proof that our problems are only a sum of the power we choose to give them, that control and focus can go to great lengths and that our minds can be stronger than we lead ourselves to believe. Somehow, what looked like a well of despair became the initiation of a healing process.

It is also a critic to the bad connotation that people have put in the term "schizophrenia" and "voice-hearing" and how that meaning influences the way patients will take it, rather than trying to see the way around it.

Jacqueline says

I loved the quote " an important question in mental health shouldn't be "What's wrong with you?" But rather, "What's HAPPENED to you"

"The Jo" says

This was an incredibly inspiring read that truly aims to promote understanding and empowerment to those who have struggled with hearing voices. The wisdom of finding healing through welcoming the voices and their wounded past... gives a tremendously powerful outlook for those that have been shunned or misunderstood for too long. The one main disagreement I had was with the seemingly segregated description of thought with biology. One cannot separate thought from biological function, it is a biological function. With every thought, there is a neural impulse that has a biological imprint. These neural networks can be modified and adapted...but that itself IS a biological process. While certain conditions have been exploited for a variety of reasons, there are justifiable arguments for pharmaceutical intervention at the appropriate times and amounts if there is a biochemical imbalance. Of course, this should always be a last resort and it has been utilized much too readily in our culture.

Cass Danz says

One of the best books I've ever read. Changed my perspective on so much.

Rosaleen Brown says

This was a good read , my only reservation is that the author had enough social capital / education / family support / money etc to facilitate her recovery (which i tKe my hat of to and would never wish to undermined) Having worked with one of the psychologists and one of the psychiatrists mentioned in the book, the realities of poor areas and Hearing Voice Networks are that they are often inaccessible to people in real need. Also I do think that social work and OT were left out a bit as I think both professions have been real champions of social change
My finial bug bare is that certain words in the book were americanised why do people do that !!!!

Paula Shulse says

Really, really interesting. It's heartening to know that progress is being made in helping people work through their difficulties. Certainly there are scars that come from childhood abuse and it's good to know that there are people finding ways to help these individuals heal rather than further stigmatizing them with labels and unneeded medication.

If you are interested in aspects of the mental health field written in layman's terms, this book is worth the read.

James says

It's a short but potent read.

Through her early experience as a diagnosed 'schizophrenic' a Psychiatrist critiques the system she was once treated by, exploring some major problems with the current medical and societal perspective towards psychosis, trauma and 'auditory hallucinations'.

To name just a few; the over-reliance on medication as a treatment for psychosis to the neglect of understanding important psychological and social factors, the failure of the biological/genetic model to fully account for 'schizophrenia' after decades of research and the relative indifference of the discipline to the potential of voice hearing as a positive therapeutic and life tool.

Eleanor's story is both inspiring and thought provoking, if you liked her TED talk I would definitely recommend the book.

Marlene says

This was a fantastic story. I purchased this book after seeing Ms. Longden's TED Talk and I'm really glad that I did. It's really a whole new way to look at voice hearing. Indeed, this book really blows apart the amorphous concept of "schizophrenia." I'd also said this book went far in restoring my faith in psychiatry and psychology. I did bog down a bit in the last half of the book mainly because it was talking about a whole lot of psychological theory that I really was blurring out on, but I'm sure it will capture the interest of anyone actually interested in psychology. This latter part is critical, I think, for practitioners to read.

But seriously, just for Ms. Longden's story of descent and recovery, this is well worth the read.

therwiterkelly says

this sums up everything i believe about mental health -- coming from a psych major who decided not to pursue a phd because i couldn't see myself being happy there, if that holds any weight.

don't believe everyone with a phd remember our society is only as good as our flawed selves!!!

there's also a poignant TED talk you could watch in lieu of this book, but if i leave one iota of a legacy behind i want it to be that i believed wholeheartedly in the tenants contained herein.

Michael Labone says

a dangerous book written by someone who is quite clearly still suffering from delusions

Mark Baker says

Very helpful

Learned so much by reading this book. Was inspired to do more with my life. Recommended this book to anyone.

Petisa García says

Es un libro corto, pero con un buen insight sobre la estigmatización de las alucinaciones auditivas y sobre cómo el acercamiento psiquiátrico tradicional sólo exacerba dañinamente los síntomas. Buen libro para repensar el concepto de enfermedad, con muchas fuentes. Se ve que la autora está acostumbrada a escribir académico así que hacia el final parece blogpost pero buena lectura de todos modos.
