



**Rufus May** was born in Hitchin and raised in London. His father was a graphic designer and he has one younger brother.

**What was family life like for you in your early childhood years?**

Very good generally until my mother had a brain haemorrhage when I was eleven - this caused a lot of strain on the family although my mother made a strong recovery. Her recovery story was later an inspiration for me to have hoped when psychiatric doctors told me I would not recover from my problems.

**What is your earliest memory you can remember?**

Bonfire night in the early 70's eating hot potatoes from the fire - at age 18, Rufus was diagnosed with Schizophrenia and when mistreated and forced to take a medication he was against for its sedative qualities, he ensued in a battle with the public health system and diagnostics.

**What is it that got you into psychology within mental health?**

I thought that psychology would enable me to help develop a more compassionate approach to extreme states of mind (e.g. confusion and distress). My own experience of biological psychiatry made me aware of the need for change in society's approach to these problems.

He wanted a *"range of approaches on offer that see people's manifestations of distress as meaningful and aim for recovering a valued lifestyle"* (A Mad Summer's Day by Rufus May, Asylum).

He got his degree at the Royal Holloway and Bedford New College in 1998 and has been working for 14 years as a clinical psychologist with extreme states that get called 'psychosis'.

**Highlight of your career to date?**

"There are many. I love being part of self-help movements and emancipatory training. I loved making the film *The Doctor who hears voices* and working with the 'real Ruth' (the documentary was about) the junior Doctor who asked me to help her learn to cope with her voices without medication. I love my independent work teaching around the world. I love Bradford and the communities there. I love *Evolving Minds* the monthly public meeting about different approaches to emotional wellbeing, I help organise in Hebden Bridge. I love the drama groups and retreats that have come from this."

**EFFECTIVE APPROACH FOR RECOVERY**

He talks openly with his patients, *"I prefer making sense with a person about their experience"*, for after all it is the *"clients who have an expertise about their own life"* (Guardian).

He is very involved in the recovery process.

Channel 4 documentary: 'The doctor who hears voices' (21 April 2008)

You are a bit famous for your unique engagement in un-medicated therapy, quoted that *"psychiatric medication is over-used as a substitute for really listening to people's experiences"* (29 July 2011 - live



webchat with Rethink). During the film you take a radical approach in listening and speaking through her (Ruth) to her 'voice'...

**What was Ruth's most effective 'coping strategy' when she was experiencing the voices at their worst?**

It varied including creating a contract of mutual respect with her main voice where she offered to listen at agreed times if he respected her and gave her space in the day. Spinning classes; Running; self-help groups; painting; writing letters to people she had unexpressed strong feelings about; walking in nature.



**And when she was dealing with her false beliefs?**

Checking them out herself or with me; keeping a record of predictions the voices made and seeing if they came true, and of course support groups.

**What was the hardest part about filming this documentary?**

To keep documenting Ruth's work with me without making her feel unsafe, so making it completely collaborative.

**For you, personally?**

There was a back lash from some more medically minded colleagues who found the film very challenging. Having the support of friends and family and the hearing voices community helped me considerably.

**You, as her mentor, what was your most effective 'coping strategy' at times when you found it hard?**

I used Zen meditation practice and mindfulness which helps me cope with stress and rejuvenate. Good friends and very importantly the support of my partner Rebecca also helped.

**PSYCHOSIS**

Rufus on psychosis: *"I find it helpful to use terms such as voices and disturbing or alternative beliefs, rather than the terms hallucinations and delusions."* Some of his online articles exploring auditory hallucinations further include:

- 'New paper I have written on unusual beliefs' (2010)
- 'Changing the power relationship with your voices'
- 'Talking with voices' (2012)

**Rufus May Famous Quote:**

*"...another victory for ordinary people with extraordinary lives..."*

You can catch all this and more of Rufus May at: <http://www.rufusmay.com/>