



What is your background? Tell us about yourself?

Where were you born and raised?

Born in the English midlands and sent from Coventry to wander the world a little... and to wonder about the world a little also. I love music and literature, have travelled quite a bit these past decades. I am a blue collar nomad with a passion for sharing and assisting in raising awareness. Left home pretty early to follow the invisible path and see where it may lead and to date it has taken me to some remarkable places and amazing people!



What is the earliest childhood memory you can remember?

Probably my little multi-coloured plastic steam train on an elastic hanger strung across the roof of my pram - it had little plastic beads within that shook when you moved it... great fun, at least for a while! Until I got propped up and could see a bit more of my world. Then, the smell of food cooking and afternoon radio shows for children before the TV became a staple medication for a young mind.

What education course did you follow? And what happened after?

The usual school exams, a stint in different types of job, teenage perturbations and the usual issues of growing and outgrowing your origins and expectations as you try all the things it turns out you were never really going to do for very long: office roles, sales, periods with and without work, most folk were fairly keen to leave school and try and get on with life, earn a pay packet, pay bills, pretty simple aspirations at that point in a life journey.

Becoming a parent encouraged me to re-examine through study, my own inner life and early experiences that required some healing over time... Social Sciences Studies, Mental Health Awareness, Recovery practices, Laing, Groz, Foucault, Alice Miller, Gloria Steinem, Carl Jung, Terence McKenna, Thomas Szas... and too many more to mention by way of illuminating and inspiring discoveries.

How did you end up in mental health, specifically 'hearing voices'?

I met a good friend from the 1980s who persuaded me to try volunteering at a drop in centre for folk dealing with mental health issues and despite my initial reservations and anxieties I really found it an enjoyable experience. Even providing time and space for people, a cup of tea, a listening ear, non-judgemental and helpful responses, you could see it had a real value and made a difference.

I got more involved in helping set up activities and relaxation sessions and after a while I was offered a role as a support worker, visiting folk at home and supporting and encouraging more self-involvement and empowerment for clients that quite often felt dismissed and un-listened to by the



system...particularly those hearing voices that were challenging to cope with; advocating for, and with, people to get their voices heard, liaising with health professionals on their behalf and working towards self-defined concepts of personal recovery. I was pretty good at spotting possibilities for healing and connecting folk up with appropriate support systems and therapies and I actually enjoyed the personal responsibilities that came with the role. Thank you Coventry Mind!

5 years on I met the rather amazing and inspiring Ron Coleman and was inspired to explore all aspects of voice hearing, possible theories and potential coping strategies. My real passion was discovered and ignited by realising that so much of what Ron shared of his own lived experience of being treated within the system for a “schizophrenic” condition held true for many others also....we needed more enlightening and positive responses to these experiences and so began my odyssey of learning.

The Hearing Voices Network was beginning to take off via Professor Marius Rommes’ pioneering realisations and work in Holland and Ron, Paul Baker, and many more activists and contributors began to develop and lay out the foundations of a different approach to understanding voices. Began a small group in Coventry that met weekly and looked at many diverse examples of historical figures who have had Visions and Voices as well as exploring theories of causation that made sense to the individual personally...from there you can develop and try out coping skills already proven to work for some voice hearers.

From there an invitation to become more involved, conferences on recovery, I gave up paid regular work and hit the road, working with Ron occasionally and providing awareness raising lectures to medical students and others at various university campuses in the UK on the prevalence of hearing voices as a common human experience, regardless of any illness diagnosis...They were fun and insightful presentations and I began to read more, explore different cultural frameworks and look more deeply at research within and without the medical model...as Frank Zappa sings: “The Music Never Stops” and I have never stopped learning to date.

Trips then followed to the American Midwest and I was honoured to be involved in helping set up and co facilitate a support group for individuals hearing voices in Madison, Wisconsin where I was blessed to make many fine friends whom I still visit almost yearly... I also got to speak on the lecture circuit at Mind Body and Spirit events and present facts and astounding information to diverse audiences. Of course many spiritual practitioners accommodate voice hearing as a part and parcel of their experience as a healer/ shaman/ meditator on a regular basis but they still were pleased to learn even more.

I gave away many workbooks on managing challenging voices and personal recovery whenever it was requested and I got to canoe the mighty Wisconsin river with good friends, got to meet war veterans who had voices in the Vets hospital in Milwaukee, found a lovely girlfriend and even trod on the Dali



Lamas' toe at the airport on the moving escalator, not knowing he was standing right behind me when I took a step back!

Would you like to tell us about your 'mental health' history?

I had a couple of "interactions" with psych systems in the 1980s, both involuntary and both necessary and both triggered by crisis and self-destructive actions and subconscious urges... I started to hear the voices of my friends who died in a car crash that also killed a couple coming the other way. I had climbed out of the car an hour earlier. We had drunk a lot. We were high. They wanted to go to a party. I met an old girlfriend. She invited me to a beer. They drove away in the rain. My phone began to ring early the next day. Voices said "Thank God... You're alive. We thought you were dead." And so I learned of the fate of my friends.

4 days later... A community funeral. Lots of tears.

Everyone told me how lucky I was but I just I felt empty and guilty .And really confused. I told no one as I couldn't articulate my experience. I drank more. I got into bar room and football related fights. I wore silver Dr Martens and a blue boiler suit that I liberated off the back of a British Gas meter readers' bicycle as he stepped, whistling, through a garden gate and rang a doorbell.

I loved punk rock and reggae and my razor blade ear ring. I laughed a lot. I suppressed a lot. I didn't really know how I felt at all. Popular but lonely. I was angry but happy at the same time. Relief and guilt strove with each other for dominion and power.

I began to dream I was buried alive. I would wake up with a jolt, gasping for breath.

And voices sometimes called me to join my friends. That I shouldn't be here.

A year or so later, in a quiet Irish town, a small platoon of local policeman will come rescue me from my attempt to follow the same path to oblivion. . Although they will have riot shields.

And I will throw bar room furnishings at them. And they will retreat. For a while. But then they return in greater numbers. They have to try and grab the crazed looking Englishman in silver boots and caked in his own blood - who awoke, much to his annoyance at having failed to kill himself and has staggered through the streets and fallen through a dark bar room doorway. The nervous barman pours the worst Guinness ever and quietly calls the police from the other room. I recall his gentle Irish voice, the quiet discourse going on. I cannot make it out. The wallpaper begins to peel off the wall and float above me. A red poppy expands in front of me. A bottle of my grandmother's heart pills means when I speak a strange slurring sound comes out. I start to cry. Big hot tears... who am I?

And there will be a man in a suit and a red tie. And a big smile. And he will forgive me for the slowly healing black eye. Though I failed to spot the needle he was hiding as he spoke. Sorry Dr B....! Little did I know back then it was the beginning of my learning. A three month trip into the psychiatric system. I saw failings and some successes, institutional abuses of power and the limits of citizens to



exercise autonomy within a disempowering system. Over time I stabilized. I left to return to England, bandaged and sorry for the fuss and worry I had caused.

That 30 years later I would have already worked within the system and outside of it over 15 years and more... well...

That eventually I realised I had both Survivor Guilt of a kind, issues relating to bereavement and loss, voices that spoke of this conflicting condition but no one to tell me of this.

I had no one to talk to or with and get support or advice. Eventually my crisis point arrived.

And to think that simply getting in and/or out of a car on a rainy Midlands Tuesday night would have such ramifications for my own life.

I had nothing to be guilty about. Just sorrow for my pals. And the elder couple who were also killed. The voices were wrong and here I am, alive.

Tell us about Voices & Visions and the journey this has taken you on?

I wanted to get good information out there and pretty much built the website with that in mind.

I tried to pool my influences, learning much from my time with folk who attended a voices group in Edinburgh, Scotland for 4 years before taking a year or so out to travel to Egypt and present to various groups there in 2010 so the site was pretty much built on the road and developed further on my return.

The noisy and crowded mega city that is Cairo, on to Alexandria and then through the desert to the beautiful oasis of Siwa, complete with a ruined hill top Temple once visited by Alexander the Great in 331BC in order to hear the Oracle speak to him and confirm him as the son of Zeus and ruler of Egypt. Oracles were highly esteemed in ancient Greek times where belief in divine communication with the Gods was an everyday acceptance for all... How times have changed!

What has been the highlight of your career to date?

Not so much a career as a peripatetic ambling through the landscape...although enjoyable!

There has never really been any plan in mind to be fair. I just keep chugging along, making occasional contributions, trying to be positive. If one can be making a little difference here and there it is very satisfying.

I really enjoy sharing opportunities wherever the invitation takes me. I would say meeting so many inspiring and beautiful people within the Hearing Voices Movement who work tirelessly to achieve change, raise awareness and challenge commonly held misconceptions and myths around voice hearing.



PsyCope 'Coping with Psychosis'
Feature of the Month – March 2013
Ivan Barry

Do you have any 'coping strategies' that you use on a daily basis?

Yes...simple meditations, music and the "occasional" German beer.

Immersion in great literature.

Luckily I have enjoyed reasonably robust mental health for the most part these past years.

What do you have lined up for 2013?

A return 3 month visit to the USA in the Autumn, maybe back to Egypt at some point if the political situation settles, develop more awareness raising opportunities, perhaps even pick a town to live in for a while and better organise myself with this in mind. I have been on the road for nearly 3 years now and I do love travel so we will see what this year brings. Backpack and books are always near to hand.

Get a Visions and Voices Open Day organised for Edinburgh and present it and do more media sharing events too.

Favourite Quote?

*"...Nothing is existing.
Everything is in a state of becoming..."*

- REIHO MASUNAGA

You can catch all this and more of Ivan Barry at: <https://visionsandvoices.weebly.com/>