

A Journey Through Psychosis

In 2001, I had my first psychotic break. I was 38 years old and had never had one before.

It started out subtly. Near the end of the year 2000, I found that my technical writing job, which I loved and did well at, became overwhelming to me. I thought it was depression, which I had had before. I decided that changing jobs would help and found another job.

Around Memorial Day of the following year, I found I couldn't concentrate on anything. The slightest thing would distract me. I also found that I couldn't think of the names of some things. I would be close—think "pen" for "pencil"—but the correct word eluded me. I knew that the word was wrong.

Somewhere along the line, I became convinced that people could read my mind. The strange thing about a delusion like that is that you know for certain that it is true. I started thinking racial epithets, which I ordinarily didn't use, and I was really miserable, thinking that people could hear me thinking those racial epithets.

Then, one day, I was looking at the mountains while commuting to work, and I heard a voice say "Beautiful". At first, I would only hear the voice occasionally, but then one day it hit with a vengeance. I heard voices most of the time, which was distracting. Some weird things happened while I was hearing voices, which led me to believe that they were real. I heard a voice speaking Hebrew, which I did not know, but recognized a word or two. And one time I thought it was 4:30, and the voice said that it was 5:00, and the voice was right and I was wrong. I also became convinced that someone from work was following me and staking out my home.

I debated calling a psychiatrist—about the racial epithets, because I thought I was a telepath, and there was nothing anyone could do about that. A voice finally told me to call. I found a psychiatrist that I really liked, who decided that I had OCD, the version with the intrusive thoughts. I joined a group for people with OCD and anxiety disorders, but it wasn't helping me. They also put me on Prozac, which wound up making me manic. The doctors agreed I was manic and weaned me off of the Prozac and put me on lithium. Around the same time, I mentioned the voices, although I didn't think that anyone could do anything about them. The doctor wanted me to go into a mental hospital, but I had no one to take care of my cat, so no go. The doctors also put me on Risperdal, but I couldn't handle the side-effects, so I stopped taking it. The third weird thing happened with the voices on lithium; the voices got really fast and my thoughts were slow. Nonetheless, a sort of fog lifted, and I started hearing voices much less frequently. My diagnosis was Bipolar Disorder I with Psychotic Features.

I also had problems with my thinking. I described it to my doctor as taking a sentence for each paragraph of a book. He called it disorganized thinking. I also would think the same thought repeatedly. That sometimes happens to this day, and it is really annoying.

Around the same time, I decided the symptoms would go away if I went back to my original job, so I interviewed, but there was a hiring freeze. I had delivered my library of books at my job (despite the psychosis!), so I quit my job and stayed home until the hiring freeze was over.

I was sort of right about the original job. I still heard voices occasionally, but it was much better. My problem was with being overwhelmed by the job. Eventually I was laid off.

I found another job. I was scrambling to all hours to get the documentation done for the upcoming release. At the end, I had a major relapse into hearing voices, etc. I contacted my doctor, and he put me on Zyprexa and told me to take a leave of absence until the meds kicked in. But when I came back, I was dealing with the overwhelm again. Plus, I was having problems getting up in the morning because I was on a boatload of meds that cause tiredness. I had another relapse the following fall, and I got laid off during it.

I moved back to where I was previously living. There I found find a doctor that I really liked. He changed my diagnosis to Schizoaffective Disorder because I had more problems with psychotic symptoms than mood symptoms.

I didn't find another job, although I was a second choice for one. I decided to change careers, move back to the Midwest, and go back to school to get a Master's Degree in Library and Information Science. It worked. I got my degree, and I have been working successfully in the field ever since. I almost never hear voices now.