



Demonstrating Kindness to Magical Beings: Alice's Story

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Context

The following text is based on therapeutic conversations taking place at Aalborg Psychiatric Hospital in Denmark. The material on which the paper is based is Christoffer's ethnographic diary of the unfolding events, written as these events took place. The purpose of the paper is to share Alice's knowledges and discoveries concerning the ability to hear voices and their significance to her well-being. We share this in the hope that both people who are able to hear voices and professionals who seek to assist them may find some inspiration for their own explorations of living with voices for the benefit of both the people who hear them and the voices themselves. This paper is part of a co-research project involving a number of people who are able to hear voices in collaboration with Christoffer Haugaard and David Epston¹.

Introduction

In the following, Alice and I (Christoffer) endeavor to share some discoveries concerning a kind of beings that she can perceive in various ways in the hope that these discoveries and knowledges may be inspirational and helpful to other people who live with similar experiences. Within psychiatric discourse, these beings have been categorized as hallucinations or hearing voices, although Alice does not prefer those terms. For that reason, I have been interested in what she might like to call them, and she has suggested 'magical beings' as her preferred term. As far as Alice can determine, the magical beings have been with her always, although she has not always had the same degree of awareness of them. She does recall their presence and how they had a will of their own when she was only eight years old. By seventeen, she became more specifically aware of them. Up to around this time, they had wanted Alice to steal things, drink dangerous chemicals and hurt other people. The difficulties of being Alice and the effects of co-existing with her magical beings troubled her parents, and they had made several attempts at getting help from a psychiatrist, something Alice was very reluctant to go along with, and which the magical beings also strongly protested. As a consequence, Alice said almost nothing about what she was experiencing. At 16-17 years of age, she was in contact with Danish Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and had some conversations with a psychologist. These conversations focused on living with Asperger's syndrome, and although she found those conversations to be meaningful, they were not very helpful for her in dealing with the magical beings, and she did not mention them to the psychologist. At eighteen, she had moved away from her parents to live in an institution due to her difficulties with anxiety, her need for assistance in daily life and

¹ For more detail, see the section New Narrative Practices with Disembodied Voices in *Journal of Narrative Family Therapy*, 2019, Release 3.





social relations. As life was becoming increasingly overwhelming for her, she was required to leave her high school education. This was an extremely frustrating and difficult time for her, and she was given tranquilizing medication daily for a prolonged period. At this time, the magical beings began to suggest to her that she would feel better if she harmed herself. They began to recommend that she cut herself or knock her head against a wall. Alice began to experiment with such practices that had been present but uninfluential up until this point. It was clear to her parents that such residential treatment was not helping Alice and they determined to repatriate her and seek help from Adult Psychiatry, for which she was now eligible as she had turned eighteen.

This was where Alice and I first met each other. Her parents had requested that she see a psychologist to help her with her anxieties. This was a very challenging situation for her, and in addition, as she informed me later, she had made up her mind to never trust a professional. At our initial meetings, Alice did not want to speak with me without a trusted person present, and even then, she did not look in my direction at all nor utter a word. It was not until after a number of such meetings that she decided to be in my office with me on her own. It was a short meeting in which she hardly spoke a word, and I recall asking her some questions about her situation and thinking out loud about what I imagined she might be thinking. To my great relief and joy, this changed slowly so that Alice and I were eventually able to have conversations like the ones we will be sharing with you here.

In this account we will be focusing specifically on a journey of discovery concerning magical beings. It is, however, important to bear in mind that these explorations are only part of our collaboration and that co-existing with troublesome (and perhaps troubled) magical beings are one challenge among a number of significant challenges to Alice living the life that she would like for herself.

Alice has received psychiatric diagnoses within both the psychosis spectrum and the autism spectrum. According to her, she has tried six different antipsychotics throughout the time I have known her. Ever since Alice and I first met, we have had weekly meetings except during holidays or other periods where I have been away from work. I have collaborated with Alice from early 2015 and until the time of writing, which is December 2020.

The Magical Beings

The magical beings have been there as long as Alice can determine, and she has no idea how they came to be or why. Her awareness of them has increased during the course of her life, and during the time that she and I have collaborated, she has given them a number of titles. Initially she referred to them as evil thoughts. Later she began to designate them as The Evil One, which gave way to calling them The Other, until she settled on calling them The Others. Alice has explained to me that she experiences them as being in possession of a will of their own, distinct from her own. They are multiple, like a group who share the same will, however, and so

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although they seem to be a multitude, they act in unity. As you might expect from something that has been psychiatrically categorized as auditory hallucinations, Alice can indeed hear them speaking with a voice at times. But they also communicate in other ways besides speaking in a way that she can hear. They also make themselves and their will known to her by means of sensations or moods, so that she can determine by this how they are feeling and whether they approve of something or not. They are also able to insert thoughts into her mind in the form of mental images and even movies with violent and horrifying content. They are able to create bodily sensations including the feeling of being physically strangled by them. Attempting to describe them to me, Alice has said that “they are like something from a different dimension outside what we can understand”.

Christoffer: Let me see if I understand: We can normally perceive three spatial dimensions and then time is a fourth dimension in physics. Do you mean dimensions in this sense?

Alice: Yes. Like they are from a fifth or seventh dimension or something.

Christoffer: Does that make them difficult to describe in any way that easily makes sense?

Alice: Yes. But sometimes they are like a fire. Like black flames close to my heart.

Living with The Others is a great challenge. During the time that I have known Alice, The Others have been constantly striving to convince Alice that she is a bad, evil, lying person and that she is not working hard enough to get better and is to blame for the problems in her life and the pain she feels. They almost constantly encourage her to jump off from tall buildings or throw herself out of cars at speed, step in front of the train, drink poisonous chemicals, continuously bang her head against the wall, or burn her hands on stoves or ovens or with boiling hot water. They also encourage her to hurt and kill others, especially people she cares about. One of their means of terrorizing her with these ideas is to use their ability to insert mental pictures and run mental films in her mind. They show her pictures of these horrible and violent things happening to her or others, often casting Alice herself as the violent person in the stories they create in her mind. This leaves Alice in fear of being an evil person who might desire or do such things, as well as being an altogether horrifying experience in itself, as these ideas are so completely contrary to her own will and the kind of person she strives to be: Kind, considerate, just and loving. In addition to subjecting Alice to this treatment, much of which she considers unspeakable, The Others also tell her that if she tells anyone about the contents of these images and films, then they will become reality, leaving Alice to deal with this alone.

Under the initial term Evil Thoughts, Alice and I collaborated during 2015 to 2018 to find ways to reduce their influence. The approach that I took to them was to strive to expose their agenda and means of being influential in order to develop strategies to resist them, and also striving to take the evaluation of Alice’s character out of the hands of the Evil Thoughts and consider her character in relation to her knowledge about the kind of person she wants to be and what she





actually does, including my experiences of knowing her as a very kind, careful and considerate person in our conversations.² During this time, Alice was also struggling with other concerns and several very challenging events took place in her life. After she became associated with Aalborg Psychiatric Hospital, she was also prescribed antipsychotic medication. Self-harm, contemplating suicide, hospitalizations including the use of restraint to stop her from self-harm were recurrent themes during this time. The Others did not seem responsive to our attempts to deal with them; however Alice did point out that at least I was kind to her and that being able to trust me to persist with kindness towards her, gave her hope and some strength to persist with her life.

A Different Approach

During 2017 and 2018, I have collaborated with Victoria and Max to document their knowledges about living with voices and making this knowledge available for others.³ One element of this was a change in my view of how one might engage with voices: Perhaps, rather than an antagonistic approach that strives to expose and resist the voices, one might practice respect for the voices and their perspective? While I was working on documenting this, Alice and I seemed to have gotten stuck. She was telling me that she could not see a future ahead of her anymore and that she didn't expect to be able to keep on living for that much longer. In May of 2018, The Others were requiring Alice to convince me that they did not exist at all and that Alice had fabricated everything and had no real problems at all. In fact, The Others required her to justify this by a desire on her part to get attention. This was a very confusing situation, as The Others did an impressive job at this charade and had Alice apologizing to me for having made a fool of me. I suspected The Others were behind this but felt I could not simply ignore what Alice was saying. I wondered how to find a way forward. This brought me to consider if Victoria's and Max's knowledges might be of some assistance here. I called them up and explained that I knew of a person who might benefit from their knowledges and asked if they might consider sharing it with this person. Both Max and Victoria were keen to help others with their stories, and so I shared extracts of their accounts with Alice. I gave this to her along with a letter to her, explaining my suspicion that The Others were requiring her to tell me that she only made everything up because The Others want her to be isolated and hope that I might get angry and expel her, if I were to believe she was a liar. In the letter, I also suggested she read Victoria's and Max's accounts:

Hi Alice.

I strongly suspect that The Others are relatives of voices that other people have told me about. I can see that they are using similar methods. Here is my suggestion for something to do: Mark those places in Max's and Victoria's accounts that make sense to

² The inspiration for this work was White, 1995.

³ See Haugaard & Max, 2019; Haugaard & Victoria, 2019





you or spark your curiosity. Bring this to our meetings so that we can consider it together. That may give us some inspiration and helpful knowledge which we may connect with our combined intelligence and creativity! In addition to being helpful for you, I hope that we may as well contribute to the collective knowledge of beings like The Others. That may help others too.

Besides this message to Alice, I also wrote a letter to The Others themselves:

Hi Others.

I write to you to inform you of certain things to avoid unnecessary uncertainty. I am aware that for you to hear or read this, Alice will have to read it or someone else must read it to Alice. But I would like to make it clear that this letter is from me, Christoffer, to you Others. If you Others have some disagreements or other about the contents of this letter, then I ask you to direct it at me. Alice is not responsible for the things I write. If she is reading it to you, she is only my messenger. Is that clear? Thank you!

Others, I would like to tell you that I have a pretty clear impression of you by now. I feel quite confident that I have a pretty high rate of success in picking out your activities. I am able to hear you standing behind certain things that Alice say. I have realized that you use Alice to say things that come from you. For example, it is you who are behind ideas that Alice is an evil person, that Alice lies, that Alice has made everything up, and that one should feel sorry for me because I am so gullible. This is coming from The Others. I also feel quite confident that I know what the point of it is:

To convince me (and probably Alice too) that Alice is a bad person who is not deserving of anyone's compassion or help. And now I will tell you what I believe concerning the reason you want to convince us of this. You want that because if you can get Alice to convince me that she is evil and unworthy of my help, then you hope that I will shun her and throw her out. By accomplishing that you hope to cut her off from a source of help. You want to cut her off from contact with anyone who treats Alice with dignity, respect and kindness. You want to cut her off from anyone who thinks she is good. And you want to separate her from anyone who supports her own will and her desires for her own life. And anyone who is paying attention to you and work against you.

What do you think, Others? Am I getting close? Do you recognize yourselves and your activities in what I am writing?

And this is where I would like to inform you of something: It is too late to shake me off! You will not succeed in that. Once when you were less cautious and probably didn't think much of me or Alice, you revealed yourselves. I have heard detailed descriptions of you and have been able to observe your activities in my office over the period of three years. I know way too much about you to sweep it off the table with a simple claim that Alice is





lying. It is not that easy. And you are exposing yourselves when you attack Alice right in front of me. I can see her reactions to how you terrorize her. I can see how you shut her up so she dares not say a word or even move. I can clearly see when you get her to hit herself (whether it is by your direct command or indirectly by making it so unbearable for her that she hits herself in a desperate attempt to get some peace from you). Honestly. Why don't you give up!

What is your game? Do you know? Do you have some purpose in tormenting an innocent young woman like this? I even understand that you started doing this when she was just a child. I honestly think that is cruel and shameful. Do you have some purpose in that? Is it something you can explain and justify? If so: Let us hear it so that we can engage with it in a fair and orderly fashion. Or is it more the case that you are trying to ruin Alice's life for no apparent reason? Do you simply enjoy pain and destruction? Or do you not know of anything else? Have you no idea what life might be about if not this? Is it a kind of game to you?

Lately you have been extra busy trying to convince me that you are just a lie and an excuse. Is that because it is getting a little too hot for you? Am I getting too close? Do I know too much? Are you concerned about the knowledge available to me from other people with knowledge of your kind? Are you concerned about what Alice may be capable of if she gets out of your reach? My offer still stands: Participate in our conversations in a respectful manner and allow Alice and me to speak freely. Then your words will be heard too, and I will strive to accommodate you to the extent that my ethics and my loyalty to Alice will allow. If you are more than destruction and torture, then I encourage you to let us know.

That is what I wanted to tell you Others for now. I hope to have captured your attention. In case I have, many thanks for that.

Regards,

Christoffer.

On our next meeting, Alice had read the extracts from Victoria and Max. She had marked a number of places in Victoria's account.

Alice: Victoria was afraid anything would happen to people she loves. I am generally afraid that anything will happen to someone I care about and that it will be my fault. Victoria sat and listened to the voices for hours – how was she able to do that? Victoria decided that if she did not go against the voices, then she would eventually die, but I cannot resist. It is too tempting. People will like me better if I do what The Others want. If I took my own life, then I would be brave enough. I would like to be brave instead of afraid. It isn't good to be afraid and





I have always been afraid. When Victoria spoke with her voices, how did she know what to say?

Christoffer: Would you like me to ask Victoria if she can explain this to us?

Alice: Yes, I would like that.

Christoffer: I will ask her.⁴

Alice: Victoria says that when you get medication to remove the voices and they persist regardless, then that is a defeat. It is a defeat. It is a defeat because medication and hospitalization doesn't help. I like having this material from Max and Victoria. It is good to just have it.

Alice also wants to tell me something that she has been wanting to tell me for a long time. It is difficult, though, as The Others are opposed to her revealing it. Nonetheless, after a while, Alice informs me that The Others use threats to silence her. She has been gathering courage to tell me for a long time, and only today did she do it. I ask her if she would consider this an act of bravery. The Others disrupt the conversation at this point. Alice suddenly looks very tense and turns away from me and looks like she is struggling. Based on our past experience, I make a guess that The Others somehow disapprove of our conversation and are giving her a hard time to stop it. I decide to address them:

Christoffer: Others, I suspect you disapprove of what we are discussing here. Okay. I think this is an important matter we are talking about, but I do not want Alice to suffer, so I agree to change the topic for now. You get your way. We'll talk no more of this for today. So, you just relax now. Go have a break for a smoke or something. We'll just talk about something else.

Alice chuckled at this, and I did as well, thinking that my remark about a break for a smoke was rather witty. We went on to talk about some everyday topics and Alice was able to relax. But then she leaned over slightly and said very quietly: "That worked pretty well".

Christoffer: What did? What worked?

Alice: Telling The Others to have a smoke worked quite well. They liked that.

Christoffer: Really?! I was just trying to lighten the mood by being a little funny. I had no idea The Others would appreciate it. That is really fascinating! I wonder if they are smokers, and maybe no one has ever given them a break before? Maybe they are exhausted sometimes.

⁴ I did ask Victoria about this, and that lead to the description of talking to voices in Haugaard & Victoria, 2019, pp. 51-52.





Alice: I don't know.

Christoffer: We are running out of time for today, but wow! This is really fascinating. The fact that they appreciated that gives me some hope that we might find a way to relate with The Others that doesn't have to be such a power struggle.

Making discoveries

Next week Alice joins me, and we begin speaking about casual matters as we usually do. We are having a pleasant conversation about this when suddenly she inquires "is it alright that The Others are in here?" I am baffled because to my knowledge she has never been unaccompanied by them.

Christoffer: Were they not here when you came in?

Alice: They are always in my head.

Christoffer: But were they stowed away somewhere in your head, and only just came out now today?

Alice: Yes.

Christoffer: Did you do that? How did you do that? And yes, The Others are welcome to be here.

She doesn't reply to that, but then she says that she has talked to The Others.

Christoffer: You talked to them? Have you ever done that before?

Alice: No.

Christoffer: What did you say?

Alice: I said I'd prefer that they do not control everything I do.

Christoffer: !?!?! Did they respond?

Alice: No.

Christoffer: When did you do that? A few days ago? On several days?

Alice: Both. I have done it on several days starting several days ago.

I readily admit to being baffled by this.

Christoffer: What did they think about that smoking break they got last week?

Alice: They liked that.





Christoffer: Have they never had anyone give them a break for a smoke before? Are they smokers?

Alice: They haven't tried that before. I don't know if they smoke. They are glad that you are nice to them. I want to get them out of my head! I want them to go over in that corner.

Christoffer: That corner there? You want them to get out of your head and over there? Okay. Would The Others like a chair?

She nods, and I get up and put a chair in the corner. She looks as if she is making some kind of effort at negotiating. This goes on for a while and I get the impression that there is some difficulty for Alice. Perhaps The Others are reluctant.

Christoffer: Is this all very new for The Others? Are they nervous about this? Have they never been spoken to before? Never had a break for a smoke before? Never been stowed away before? Never been asked to get out of your head and into the corner before?

Alice confirms all this.

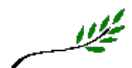
Christoffer: The Others – I guess you are rather anxious about all this. I can assure you that no harm will come to you. My office is a safe place for Alice as well as for you. You may sit on the chair in the corner, and nothing will happen to you or Alice. You may even smoke over there if you want. I am giving you special permission to smoke in my office.

After a while, Alice confirms that The Others are now in the chair.

We go on to have a conversation about what has transpired. I am amazed at what is going on and trying to fathom what it is that Alice is doing and how on earth it has come to pass that The Others are in some sort of agreement with her requests.

Alice: It helps to read the things you have written down for me and the material about Max and Victoria. And it helps to talk to The Others. I also accidentally found a letter from you with something to say to The Others from last year that I think may be useful. I will keep that and use it for emergencies. This all helps me to get The Others out of my head and then I can deal with them better. If they are only in my head, it all becomes a mess.

During this, The Others do interfere somewhat on occasions. For example, they compel Alice to hit herself twice although I have told them that this is not okay. Alice and I then sit on our hands to prevent any further incidents of this. After a while, The Others jump back into Alice's head, which is visible by a return of the extremely tense and nervous-looking body language that The Others produce. I try to calm The Others by reassuring them that we are ending our





meeting for today and that I am very grateful for their involvement in the conversation today. As well, I suspect that so many new things happening at once are a little too much for them.

Christoffer: Alice, do you think The Others have gotten scared of me lately?

Alice: Yes. And they are scared of disappearing. I want them to disappear. But I don't want to be without them.

Christoffer: I am very hopeful after this that we can find new ways for you to co-exist. Have I mentioned I know someone who was terrorized by a Triad of Terror and now they are her helpers? Maybe The Others can be friends or at least get a different job in your life. I am hopeful after this conversation that that is possible.

Leaning over and speaking quietly so The Others wouldn't pay too much attention, Alice confides in me that mostly she wants The Others to disappear, but they wouldn't have her say that. Consequently, we agree that leaving her life is too much for them to handle, and that we will make it our agenda to work towards a better relationship with an acceptance of their presence. She also confides in me that, although she really liked our conversations up until this point, they have also seemed somewhat boring and not going anywhere until recently.

Christoffer: How recently?

Alice: Until last time when you said I might be able to help someone. Now this is exciting. I am excited about this.

Christoffer: Wow! I am too. I think every observation you make now is important! We are venturing into the unknown and making discoveries. I have seen voices and similar problems respond to various things and change their ways, but what happened here today was a first for me. I am amazed by what just transpired right here right now! Please keep me informed on your discoveries!

Alice: This was a very good conversation today!

I was left in amazement and puzzled as to what exactly it was that I had just witnessed.

On our next meeting, Alice tells me that she has been feeling bad about putting The Others in the corner like she did last time.

Alice: It was better that day when you offered them a smoking break than the day, I put them in the corner.

Christoffer: Why is that?





Alice: I must not decide what they should do. They make me feel bad whenever I try to do anything to make me feel better, or when anyone tries to do something helpful for me. They punish me for it.

Christoffer: Do The Others not appreciate when someone else attempts to be in charge?

Alice: Right.

Christoffer: Do The Others want to be in charge?

Alice: Yes.

Christoffer: But do they appreciate being treated with respect?

Alice: Yes, they do.

Christoffer: How could it have made a difference to The Others to get a smoking break?

Alice: I don't know if it was because it helped, or if it was because it made us laugh.

Christoffer: Would they like to have cigarettes? I would buy some for them if they did.

Alice: They would like that. But you don't have to buy cigarettes, Christoffer!

Christoffer: It's fine, Alice. No problem. I don't mind doing that at all.

Alice: Okay.

I then purchase a pack of cigarettes and bring them to my office for our next meeting. In the meantime, I really wonder what The Others will want from us. For example, will they want the cigarettes to be lit? Or are they able to consume them somehow without them being lit? There is a fire alarm in my office and regulations prohibit smoking. Will I have to go outside and light one for them and then leave it to smolder? Then in early July we are sitting in my office again. I take out the cigarettes and put them on my desk by the corner where The Others were sitting the day Alice got them out of her head. I open the pack and pull out a few. Then I sit back in my chair.

Christoffer: You are very welcome to have a smoking break, Others. I have bought cigarettes for you, as I promised. (Turning to Alice) Can they smoke them on their plane of existence, without them being physically lit?

Alice: They can smoke them without them being lit. They just appreciate that you have bought them.

Christoffer: Good! There is a fire alarm here, so if they wanted them lit, we'd have to come up with a solution to that.





Alice laughs and says: They don't really want to get over there. They say it is crazy. They say you just want to expose me. That you just want to trick me by gaining my trust before you expose me.

Christoffer: What do they mean? Expose what?

Alice: Expose that I am a liar because there isn't really anything wrong and everything is something I am just making up.

Christoffer: I am not trying to trick anyone. Not you Others either, in fact. Nor do I want to expose Alice in any way. It is obvious to me that something is torturing Alice and making life very difficult for her and I would like to help her out with that. I don't really want to trick you Others either. How about this: If we speak respectfully of you, will you give us some peace to speak freely for a little while? If we promise not to speak behind your back?

Alice: I think you need to tell them.

Christoffer: Tell them what? Do you mean tell them to get in the chair in the corner?

Alice nods.

Christoffer: Others, please be so kind as to go over to the corner. Will you please do that now? There are cigarettes for you. I would very much like to be a good host for you, and you are my guests here. It would make me a little sad if you did not receive my hospitality at all.

Alice informs me that The Others are hesitant, and I repeat my invitation for them to be my guests and sit in the corner.

Alice: We are discovering important things and The Others are saying it is crazy.

Christoffer: Do you mean that they say that our important discoveries are crazy? Is that to distract us from it?

Alice nods.

Christoffer: I suspect that when The Others say it is crazy, or even that they don't even exist, then it is because we are on track to discovering something that makes them concerned about losing their influence. Do you know what they think or know is the alternative to being attached to you? If they lost their grip on you, would they be thrown into another world? Or would they be thrown into nothingness?

Alice nods.





Christoffer: Nothingness? Is that what The Others think or know is the alternative?

Alice: That is sort of implicit, I think.

Christoffer: Then I can understand why they are afraid and suspicious. In that case, they are struggling for their very existence. You Others, I would like to tell you something about my and Alice's intentions. I believe you have been eavesdropping when Alice and I have talked about it. We have been talking about how we do not believe you can accept getting out of her life and that the agenda that we do believe in is about creating more pleasant and, dare I say, harmonious ways of co-existing. I would in fact like to get to know you. I am making an effort to show my respect for you. I spent 45 kroner⁵ on cigarettes for you.

Alice: I feel bad for you.

Christoffer: For me? No, I am quite okay. It is fine. I want to show this hospitality and I can afford cigarettes.

Alice: They are happy that you are kind to them.

Christoffer: I am happy to hear that. I very much desire to be respectful towards you Others. Do you drink coffee?

Alice: They would like to have coffee. It is fortunate that I got you as my psychologist.

Christoffer: Yes! How many people would be interested in getting to know you Others? How many would offer you a break for a smoke? How many would buy cigarettes for you? How many would treat you to coffee at their own expense? My guess is that you Others have probably never ever been treated like this? I wonder if most people who become aware of you want to get rid of you? I wonder if most people who know about you would want Alice to have so much medication that you just disappear! In that case, you are indeed very fortunate to have run into me!

Alice: Maybe I can become friends with them? If they weren't so mean.

Christoffer: Did you hear that Others? Did you just hear that offer? Someone just considered being friends with you, if you are not mean! Wow! What do you say?

Alice: It's just annoying that they are there when I sleep as well. They give me nightmares.

⁵ Danish currency. 45 kroner is approx. 7 US dollars.





Christoffer: Are they working all the time? What is this Others – your first break for a smoke in... what, more than twenty years? Your first break in over twenty years! Oh my! That is a long time indeed to wait for a smoke! Do you never get a break? And you don't sleep at night either? Couldn't you need a rest?

While speaking to The Others, I have been looking towards the chair in the corner where the cigarettes are. Turning back to Alice I say: Alice, I think they may be attached to you because the alternative is nothingness and they are at work at all times to have a grip on you.

Alice: Maybe I could make the bed for them?

Christoffer: Yes. Maybe a little space somewhere. A shelf or a box or some room on the windowsill.

Alice: I have both a bed and a couch. I could prepare the bed for them.

Christoffer: Do you prefer to sleep on the couch?

Alice: I always sleep on the couch.

Christoffer: Right. Maybe you could try that out so they could have some rest at night. You know, Alice, I have come across people who co-exist with beings that seem similar to The Others in some ways, and some of them have become friends with them. And even some who used to be friends with them, and then they fell out with each other. What should we call someone like The Others who may have something in common with beings that some have called 'voices' and psychiatry calls voices or hallucinations? What do you think, Others? What would you prefer?

Alice: It is okay with voices. Maybe 'magical beings'. Maybe such negative energies can become magical beings if I concentrate on it and take care of them.

Christoffer: Is it possible to take care of them? Do they perhaps not know how to be nice?

Alice: I haven't had an awareness of them. Not until I was around seventeen. So, I haven't been able to take care of them.

Christoffer: Have they perhaps always been rejected and been something people wanted to get rid of?

Alice: If I am kind to them and take care of them, then maybe they can evolve.

Christoffer: That is a fascinating thought. I'll just write that down... Maybe they can learn how to be nice if people are kind to them?

Alice: But how can I have friends like that? Won't other people think it is abnormal?

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Christoffer: Some will most likely think that. Maybe the trick is to be discreet about it and do it in ways that are not so visible. I know people who are friends with someone similar to The Others, and some people have guardian angels and helping spirits and that kind of thing.

As the conversation reaches its end, I make sure to say that I'll see to it that there are cigarettes for The Others next time as well, and also coffee for everyone. I also write a letter for The Others, as a break of a few weeks in our meetings is coming up due to our summer holidays:

A Letter for The Others

Hi Others. I hope you don't mind that I have taken the liberty of writing a letter for you. I would like to ask you to allow that Alice reads this letter so that you can get to hear it. Please remember it is from me. These are my words, not Alice's.

First of all, a thousand thank yous for the conversations we have had with your participation during the past four weeks. It has been a great joy and honor for me to speak with you directly. It has also been a great joy for me to be able to provide you with hospitality. I am glad that Alice has discovered that you appreciate breaks and like cigarettes and coffee – things I am able to deliver. I can tell you that I have been hoping for such a situation for a long time where we could speak with each other. I know it may be challenging for you to participate in our conversations like you do now. If there is anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable then please let me know. I just might be able to accommodate it. I will see to it that there is coffee and cigarettes at our future meetings.

I would also like to ask something of you, if it is not too much. I am terribly curious about everything that is happening now and what you Others and Alice might discover over the next weeks before I see you again. Perhaps you come to an arrangement where you borrow Alice's bed? Because I am so curious and fascinated with you and Alice's experiments (have you noticed her courage and creativity as I have?), I hope that Alice might make some notes and document how things develop. Others, will you consider allowing Alice to make notes of her observations for me? I would really appreciate that. Frankly, I regard her observations as invaluable. Some of the things that have been happening in our meetings lately are beyond what I thought was possible and I suspect we are exploring unknown territories. Will you please allow her to make notes of her observations? I would take great joy in that and be very grateful to you. I also suspect there may well be other people and others of your kind that might one day be grateful to Alice for her discoveries and observations. Will you do me the favor of allowing her to do that on my behalf?

Thank you in advance, Others. Kind regards, Christoffer.





Further Discoveries Concerning The Others

After the break in our meetings, I am very keen to hear what has transpired and what further observations Alice might have made. I set out the chair in the corner behind my desk for The Others and set out cigarettes. I also pour a hot cup of coffee for Alice, myself and for The Others. I put their cup next to the cigarettes and say, “this is for you, Others”.

Alice: There have been some days where The Others have not bothered me so much. I have told them that they may look on when I am gaming. For their entertainment.

She suddenly becomes tense.

Alice: The Others say, “what you think is not important”.

Christoffer: Are they saying that in relation to my letter to them where I suggest that your ideas and observations are important?

Alice: Yes. And they don’t like me taking notes.

Christoffer: I suspected they might feel that way about it.

Alice: On those days when they haven’t been there as much, it is tempting to just enjoy it. That may be the times when I can become friends with them. They don’t like that idea!

Christoffer: Right. Okay.

Alice: Also, I have a respiratory infection. They haven’t been as hard on me because I am ill.

Christoffer: Is that because they are taking into consideration how you are feeling?

Alice: When I am ill, then I already feel bad and then they don’t have to do as much.

Christoffer: It still sounds like a kind of consideration. Do The Others have a heart?

Alice: When I am ill I focus more on the fact that I feel bad in that way, and maybe don’t feel The Others so much because of that. And it is okay that you can’t do so much when you are ill.

Christoffer: If you are not able to do something, then you will have to justify it to The Others, and that is easier when you are ill?

Alice: Yes. They show me things all the time. Every time I close my eyes. They show me insects.

Christoffer: You Others, why do you show Alice insects all the time? What’s up with that?

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Alice: They don't know how to do anything else.

Christoffer: Was that your knowledge of them, Alice, or did The Others just express that insight about themselves?

At this question, Alice shows signs of being uncomfortable and abruptly turns her head as if struck by an invisible hand.

Alice: They are not there at all.

I become concerned if The Others might be on their way to punishing or attacking Alice at this point. Obliging Alice to say they don't exist seems to be a sign that they cannot accept what we are doing.

Christoffer: Was that The Others? It looks like they interfered. Right, I suspect something about this conversation is making The Others not feel safe. Let's just sit on our hands, Alice. That way it is more difficult for them to get you to hit yourself. I'll do it too so it doesn't seem so strange. You Others? I do not mean to provoke you. I hope we manage to speak about matters in an acceptable way. Do take a cup of coffee and enjoy the cigarettes.

Alice: They are very happy with the coffee and the cigarettes.

We seem to have averted this potential attack. I do not continue with the prior line of questions and turn to something else that I hope is more acceptable to them.

Christoffer: I am very pleased with that. If they like scaring people and if it is a game to them, I wonder if there is a way for us to give them some of what they like without anyone getting hurt? What if we showed them a gory movie? A really gory one. Should we consider that?

Alice: Maybe. But I don't like movies like that at all.

Christoffer: Nor do I. But it isn't for us. We could play it on my computer monitor in the corner, so we didn't have to look at it. Only The Others. And maybe it should be something that isn't really realistic and something funny. Otherwise I wouldn't be comfortable showing it to them anyway. Maybe something comical like one of Peter Jackson's old movies.⁶

Alice: I guess we could try that.

Christoffer: If they don't know how to do anything else than the things they do; may I tell them a bit about how to be kind and what love is? Would that be okay?

⁶ I chose Peter Jackson's movies *Braindead* and *Bad Taste*.





Alice: Yes. I would like that.

Christoffer: Others, I would like to tell you something about how to be kind. An example may be something like being interested in what another person cares about and being respectful and mindful of what matters to another person. For example, Alice loves her rabbit and it means a lot to her that he is safe and well. That is something you could be mindful of. You have this ability to put images in her mind. That is a skill you have. If you were to show kindness, you could give her images of her rabbit being safe and happy, or that he is eating the food she gives him and enjoying it. Alice may very well appreciate such images because she loves him. That is my take on it anyway.

Alice: What you are saying is correct.

Christoffer: What do The Others have to say about it?

Alice: They don't like me saying it.

Christoffer: Is that perhaps because they would like to come off strong and hard at all times, and maybe want to seem intimidating to me? Might there be something about this that The Others are concerned might lead to them losing face and appear in a way that they themselves regard as weak?

Alice: Yes, that is right. Why do they do that?

Christoffer: My guess is that it is a way for them to maintain authority and influence over your life and discourage us from what we are doing. I am very interested in being considerate to The Others. Do you think you might be able to say what their response is without it provoking them too much?

Alice: I suspect nothing could happen from doing so. They are interested in it.

Christoffer: The Others are interested in kindness?

Alice: Yes.⁷

Christoffer: They are interested in how to be kind? Wow! That is very joyful for me to hear.

Alice: It is embarrassing for them.

⁷ Alice and I would like to add an update to this. I explained kindness to The Others, taking Alice's rabbit as an example. In 2019 Alice did in fact report to me that The Others had begun to show her images in her head of herself taking good care of the rabbit. I took great joy in hearing about this and thanked The Others for this act of kindness towards Alice.





Christoffer: Okay. I am very happy that they are interested, though. Perhaps we can tell them about kindness when we meet? By the way, did you try offering them a bed to sleep in?

Alice: Yes, I make the bed for them. I still have nightmares, but The Others aren't always in them.

Christoffer: Okay? So maybe they use the bed? You Others, do have another sip of coffee and your last smoke for today.

Alice: They are very appreciative of the coffee and cigarettes.

Christoffer: I am happy about that. That is also a way of showing consideration and kindness.

Alice: They say it is odd.

Christoffer: With the bed? Well, maybe. I don't think odd things are necessarily bad, though, just for being odd. Perhaps being odd mostly means that some people have trouble dealing with it and that because of this one must act with some discretion with certain things. So what if it is odd if it works? I think this comment about oddness is the stuff The Others say to confuse us.

Alice: Yes. And it is hardly any more odd than that The Others are here. That would be the oddest thing.

Christoffer laughing: Indeed.

Over the coming meetings, Alice informs me that she now speaks with The Others every evening. She lays out a pillow for them and tells them that they may sleep beside her.

We carried on with these practices, experiencing ups and downs in relations with The Others. We also made the additional discovery that The Others like to watch movies. It became apparent to us that The Others were quite interested in violence. We deduced this from the extreme violence of the images they put in Alice's head and how they encouraged her to be violent to both herself and other people. So maybe they had a thirst for blood? I suggested to Alice that perhaps they would enjoy seeing gory movies? Maybe this could satisfy their thirst for violence? The Others accepted this, and accordingly we added this to the hospitality that they received in my office: They would get the chair behind my desk, a hot cup of coffee, a pack of cigarettes and I would put on a gory movie on my computer so that they, but not Alice and I, could watch it on my computer. We have kept up these elements since September 2018. Both being fans of Ghibli movies, we also considered the possibility that the character of Mr No-Face in Chihiro – Spirited Away might help us to understand what kind of beings The Others were. Interestingly, The Others quite liked the comparison and allowed us to explore this connection without interruption.

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Evaluating in October and November 2018

We kept up the practice of offering The Others cigarettes, a cup of coffee and putting on a gory movie for the meetings in my office. During this time we engaged with The Others and tried to understand who they are and how best to interact with them, arriving at a practice of very cautious diplomacy. We also talked about other matters, however, and The Others were by no means the only concern for Alice. In October and November, Alice made some evaluations:

Alice: I like this practice of trying to understand them. And I like that it is like we are on an adventure. That makes me feel better. It is easier to live with them that way. When they are not simply something that needs to go away, but someone we can try to understand. Maybe they can learn to be friends? Don't you think they have already changed?

Christoffer: Yes, I do. We are able to have a conversation with them now. That was not possible before.

Alice: They say it is stupid.

Christoffer: I suspect they say that because what we are talking about seems alien to them, but at the same time, I suspect they are interested in it, even though they may feel embarrassed about it. Maybe they need time? Without us putting pressure on them.

Alice: How?

Christoffer: If we are kind to them and give them cigarettes and coffee and show them movies, and then just allow them to sit there and observe us, then maybe they will learn something, and it won't seem so alien to them?

Alice: I like the bit with showing them movies. When I know they are watching the movie, then they aren't paying so much attention to me. Then I know they are doing something else. It reminds me of something about horses. If you try to push a horse too much, they won't do anything. They'll be stubborn. I once had a horse that would step on my foot. If I tried to push him away, he would just put in more weight.

Christoffer: For the sake of helping other people who may want to try to talk to magical beings or voices and teach them to be friendly, could you describe how you do it?

Alice: When The Others are mean to me, I think to myself that I should be gentle towards them. That way I am doing something instead of just taking it. That means that I act in the situation. I guess that is a positive thing, whether or not it has an effect on The Others.

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Christoffer: Do they reply when you speak to them?

Alice: They don't always reply, but they do react to it. Their response can be both positive or negative. They sometimes create stories or movies in my head. Then I tell them "I don't want you making movies in my head. I don't like those movies." I try to be gentle and mild. I don't feel like being angry at them – I feel sorry for them. I have come to realize that when I talk to them, I am automatically nice to them without making any effort to. I speak calmly and in a friendly manner. I regard them like Mr. No-Face in *Chihiro – Spirited Away* or like a horse, and then I wouldn't be angry. Surprisingly, that is quite easy for me. The Others aren't going away, so if I am supposed to be mad at them then I'd have to be very angry all the time. I try to consider how it may be tolerable that they are here.

As Alice told me this, The Others try to interfere, clearly not wanting her to say these things. They compelled her to slap herself and had her say they don't exist.

Christoffer: Others, I would like to apologize for moving too quickly. I am aware that we are discussing things that are difficult for you and that you don't feel at ease with. I may ask more questions and say more than you like due to my enthusiasm and curiosity. I would like to assure you that I do not do so out of a lack of respect for you.

Alice: But I do want to share my knowledge. That is for me to decide.

Christoffer: I agree with you. Your experiences, your knowledge is yours to decide about. Others, if this is something you do not appreciate, may we compensate you in some way?

Alice: The approach that we have now means that I feel MUCH better. It makes it exciting to discover things about The Others and find a way to live with them. I think I have accepted that they are here and that has given me a different approach. The Others are very happy about the coffee and the cigarettes and showing them movies is also really good. It takes their attention off me. The Others have changed with all we have been doing lately. They are becoming likeable. Since we have taken this approach, I feel better. It makes it better. It is like going on an adventure. It feels like we are Alice in Wonderland, trying to figure out how to interact with strange creatures.

Dealing with Aggressions and Calming Down The Others

We provide here an excerpt from our conversations that exemplifies how The Others are sometimes enraged and how we have tried to learn to interact respectfully with them under such circumstances. This is from late 2018. Prior to this conversation, Alice had generously

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allowed me to reveal some of our explorations in a teaching context. I started out telling her about the teaching and the responses from the participants. The Others had a hard time with it. They had her hit herself twice. Each time, I spoke calmly to them, like: "Others, I suspect something about this concerns you or makes you uncomfortable. That is okay. I would very much appreciate your words here. Please allow Alice to pass on your concerns. I promise to listen and take it into account. I don't want to make you any more uncomfortable than what may be absolutely necessary." And as they kept having a hard time and began threatening to directly hurt me also, thereby scaring Alice quite a bit, I added "Alright, Others. I hear you. I understand what you are trying to tell us. I won't say another word about this for now. Please be calm and relax. I have heard you. I respect you. I will stop this for now." Then I asked Alice if they were calming down, but they were not. They were acting violently. Being aware of Alice's experience with horses and having the feeling that The Others were acting like an agitated animal, I asked Alice:

"If this was a wild, agitated horse and we were in an enclosure with it, what should we do?"

Alice: Be kind towards it. And calm.

Christoffer: Okay. Others? You are welcome here. You are welcome to be here. I understand that you have a concern. That is okay. That is perfectly alright. I am listening to you. I hear what you are saying. Are they still wild?

Alice: Yes.

Christoffer: Is it helpful if I am quiet for a while?

Alice: Maybe.

I stayed completely quiet for a while and tried to relax myself as much as possible and breathe slowly.

Christoffer: (Whispering in a most calm and unafraid way) Let us try to calm ourselves right down. Get the heart rate down. Breathe slowly. Like with a horse.

We were quiet for a while. Alice moved her head side to side, like someone being slapped, but then these movements subsided, and she just sat still in her chair. I decided to attempt to speak to The Others again, looking into the space behind my desk across the room where we seat The Others.

Christoffer: You are welcome here, Others. It is okay. I wish you no harm whatsoever. You are safe. Nothing will happen to you or Alice. No harm will come to you. You are welcome. You must be exhausted! You may relax and have a smoking break. Please do not hesitate to do so. Are they more calm now, Alice?

Alice: Yes. They are still saying ugly things, but they are calm.





Christoffer: That is good, Others. Very good. You are doing well (I am bearing in mind what Alice has once explained to me about the importance of positive feedback for animals). Just enjoy your coffee and another cigarette. That is all good.

Alice: They are very happy about the cigarettes and coffee.

Christoffer: Good, good. Very good. You are welcome. It is my pleasure.

As promised, we did not discuss the material from the teaching any further. Then Alice said she had something to say. At this point, she was relaxed and able to speak quite freely again and it seemed resolute that The Others were calm again. Alice then told me that since last week, she has been speaking to The Others a great deal and told them many things, more than she can readily summarize. And she has asked them:

“Why do you not want me to keep living?”

Christoffer: A very good question! Did they answer it?

Alice: Yes, they did.

Christoffer: What was their reply?!

Alice: The Others say that they feel very bad and do not desire to live any more. If I die, then the connection between us is dissolved.

She added that she had also been telling them when she doesn't appreciate what they are saying to her. She has been disagreeing with them about matters such as their assertion that she was ugly. In reply she had said “aah I don't think that is entirely accurate”. They seemed surprised that she answered them back and did not attack her for it. She had also been talking to them about how they often claim that they are not really there at all. Suddenly, Alice and I both felt that knowing how The Others feel and why they wanted Alice to die, really helped us to make sense of their actions. Alice concluded “I feel so sorry for them”. I did too.

Christoffer: Do you think we were asking a lot from The Others today?

Alice: I think we are.

Christoffer: Reminds me of back in June when a lot of things happened that was completely new for The Others. Maybe today is like that. I guess we have to be very respectful and move slowly.

Alice: I am sorry about that. Is that evil?

Christoffer: For me?

Alice: Yes.





Christoffer: No, not at all. Of course, my curiosity wants to carry on, but I also want to respect The Others and I don't want anyone to get hurt, and when The Others are agitated, they hurt you. I don't want that. I am alright with this. It is okay that we must move slow.

Alice: Okay.

Alice and I hope that the above provides an example of the kind of diplomacy and respect that was required to interact with The Others and the ways of calming them down that we developed. This excerpt also mentions a discovery that had a significant impact on our perception of The Others: They were suffering and were trying to break down Alice so that she would kill herself in despair, giving The Others relief from their pain by ending their existence. Although we could not support such a project, it did help us to understand the motivations of The Others and to feel some sympathy for them. This led us to wonder why they didn't just wait, as eventually Alice would die of old age. But they didn't have the patience for that. We began to explore possibilities for making life more fun for The Others so they would not long for death so much. Perhaps the smoking breaks, coffee and movies already provided them with some relief? They very consistently appreciated this hospitality no matter what other sentiments they had concerning me or Alice. Alice also discovered that they would at times be able to share a sense of humor. Their sense of humor was dark and even morbid at times, but on occasion, Alice could join them in what they found comical and have a laugh with them. She also discovered that they tended to support her in being angry and in having a strong sense of justice. Over time, Alice did begin to express this more openly, perhaps to some satisfaction for The Others. They also seemed to appreciate being spectators to her computer gaming. At a later point, Alice began to practice a form of martial art, and this appealed a great deal to The Others. We hope that these developments do indeed contribute to making existence more bearable for them.

We also discovered some of the reasons for The Others being in such pain. It turned out that they were frustrated that they could never do what they wanted because Alice resisted them. They wanted to be violent and express their rage. We came to suspect that rage could in fact be their basic nature, but because Alice was not able, and furthermore didn't want to do the kind of violent things they liked, they could not channel their explosive energy into the world and ended up burning in their own rage. Here we are only summarizing these explorations. We hope perhaps to be able to make this knowledge available at some point in the future.

Hospitality is put to the Test

In April and May of 2019 there was an incident in which Christoffer and The Others had a fall out with each other. This involved Christoffer becoming frustrated with them and withholding the hospitality we had established. We include here an account of this incident, as we suspect it





gives some indication of the effects and challenges of hospitality towards magical beings like The Others.

Some very positive developments were taking place in Alice's social life in March of 2019, she had decided to care less about what other people think and just do what she liked, and she was collaborating with her mother to organize the written material from our conversations to make it easy to use in daily life. At the meeting where Alice informed me about these positive developments, The Others were quite calm, and earned a big sticker.⁸ They also repeated a desire they had expressed to me before: Their desire to be friends with me. Similar to the first time they approached me about such a prospect, I thanked them and stated my desire to also be friends with them, and that in order for us to be so, Alice would also have to be their friend, and they would have to respect her right to live her own life. I then informed The Others that I have come to regard Max's voices⁹ as friends over time, and that they have expressed concern for my wellbeing, and in light of such a development, I see friendship as a possibility. But it must include Alice. I also gave Alice an abbreviated account of how her discoveries are proving helpful to others.

Through April, Alice, David and I experimented with developing ways for Alice to provide hospitality for The Others like I did in my office. We hoped that this would contribute to giving them some peace of mind and time to rest beyond the meetings in my office. At this time, the hospitality in my office was going very well and we wanted to extend that. I gave her some of the cigarettes I keep for them to take home and give them, and David composed some tentative words of acknowledgement that Alice might read to them in the evening. Alice also suggested setting out a plate of biscuits for them.

At the end of April, Alice had been experimenting with reading respectful words to The Others and offering them some cigarettes from me in the evenings. They hadn't responded to it, and Alice was concerned that they might try to harm her when she speaks to them, which was unlike last year when it had a positive effect on them. The Others were reasonably calm in my office, but they were still cruel in Alice's daily life, and she had now found it necessary to resort to ignoring them again. It seemed what we were doing was no longer having much effect outside my office. During a conversation about this, I had just mentioned to her that I was working on a draft about our work with The Others and handed it to her, and she suddenly froze, made a sudden movement of her head and stared directly into my eyes. This is something she only ever does in exactly this circumstance and declared in a most urgent tone of voice that "The Others are not there. They don't exist. It's just a lie". I questioned this,

⁸ At this time, we would give The Others little stickers as acknowledgements for their respect for Alice and I. Alice had suggested this as a way to give them positive feedback on their behavior. The Others enjoyed this and were eager to get these colorful stickers that Alice had purchased for them. We would put them in a special little booklet with a date for each.

⁹ See Haugaard and Max, 2019.





referring to all our work and all my observations and our knowledge of this being a diversion by The Others. But she strongly maintained it, apologizing for making a fool of me. I asked, “why would you lie about all this?” She replied, “to get attention and because I am evil”. I disagreed and added that “all people want attention. What that means is having one’s existence acknowledged by others and your life being attended to by others. Everyone needs that. I know that sometimes people who self-harm are told that they do it for attention and this is taken to be bad, but I disagree. If someone does something like that for attention they are certainly in a desperate situation, and the fault is one those who are not paying attention”. Alice nodded in agreement with my view. I then spoke to The Others and complained to them about this, telling them I know full well why they do this. Alice repeated the claim of their non-existence, and then began hitting herself. At first, she stopped when I told her to please cease, but it started again soon after, and I reached over to gently hold back her arm, at which she said, “please don’t hurt me!” I replied that I wouldn’t dream of doing anything of the sort. Then Alice informed me “I want to kill you”, but with the facial expression of someone who is scared of what response this will provoke. I told her that I did not believe that for one second and that I know her to be a considerate person who appreciates these conversations, a very strong proof that she does not want to kill me at all. The Others didn’t stop, however. I suggested changing the topic so that we could talk about everyday matters while we listen to music as usual, hoping this might satisfy The Others. It seemed clear to me that they could not accept what we were talking about. This did calm them down and we could finish our meeting as usual.

I became very frustrated with The Others, however, as I had begun to expect them to be significantly more accepting of Alice and me by this time. This violent response from them confused me, and I found their turn for the worse towards Alice outside of my office quite demoralizing. I experienced a moral dilemma: Is it right for me to persist in giving The Others hospitality even if they return to attacking Alice? Would I be expressing some kind of acceptance of their return to aggressive behavior by doing so? Or should I make it clear to The Others that I expect them to give something in return for my hospitality and that reverting to attacking Alice like this would have consequences for our relationship? How could I consider being friends with The Others if they act like this? Would I betray my loyalty to Alice if I kept treating The Others like respected guests while they compelled her to hit herself? I decided to do what The Others seemed to be asking me to do: To act as if they don’t exist. This is what I did on the following meeting. I told Alice that I would respect The Others’ claim about their own non-existence, and as a consequence of their non-existence they could not meaningfully be guests. I poured coffee for Alice and myself, but none for The Others, nor did I pull out a chair for them and put out cigarettes or put on a gory movie. Instead, I followed up on Alice’s news that she had decided to pay less attention to what other people think about her. The Others interfered, however, angry that they were not getting their smoking break and movie as usual. I explained to them that the reason was their behavior at our last meeting, and I told them that I expect them to treat Alice with respect and refrain from attacking her in order to get hospitality in my office. The Others refused.

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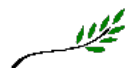


The next week, now in mid-May, I maintained non-hospitality and once again The Others were hard on Alice. Seeing as they were not backing down, Alice and I agreed to return some of their privileges. I pulled out the chair for them and set out the cigarettes. A couple of days after this conversation, I was contacted by Alice's mother who told me that Alice was having a lot of trouble with The Others and that they were beginning to have some success in pressuring Alice into self-harm. They were trying to get her to pour boiling water over her hands and put her hands on a burning hot stove. Her mother informed me that this turn for the worse had happened just within the past week. I quickly scheduled a meeting with Alice, and it was immediately apparent that The Others were highly agitated and aggressive. Since the last meeting, I had been fortunate to be able to consult another co-researcher on her knowledges of interacting with very aggressive voices - specifically voices that feel hurt and threatened and are prone to despair and lashing out.¹⁰ Her advice was clear: "You must soothe them. Be sweet and understanding. Calm them down with sugar and reassurance. Standing up to them agitates them immensely". As I had this in mind as well and as it seemed clear to Alice and me that my attempt to get tough on The Others was quite ineffective, I immediately apologized to The Others for having deprived them of hospitality. I acknowledged this as being entirely my mistake and made a promise to them that I would never deny them hospitality in my office ever again. Prior to the conversation, I had already expected that something like this was necessary and had made preparations. Therefore, I was able to immediately pour them a hot cup of coffee, set out their cigarettes and put on their movie. At this, The Others calmed down from their highly agitated state. In this conversation, Alice also told me that she had not been able to take her medication regularly for a period of time. She would focus on doing so from now on and did take it regularly over the following days. When we met again a few days after, The Others did very well, and things seemed back to the normal before this incident. Alice continued to investigate ways of treating The Others at home and found that showing them their gory movies on her computer worked very well. She would put on a movie and this would give her one or two hours where their attention was off her and she could be very much in peace.

By the end of May, Alice was doing okay again and had been out with friends and quite busy. The Others were somewhat exhausted from Alice's busy-ness and just relaxed in my office and she and I just spoke freely. She would continue to play movies to The Others at home as this had proven very helpful. We seemed back on track.

This incident coincided with a period of irregularity of antipsychotic medication, which is likely to have affected Alice. However, there did seem to be a close connection between specific actions and the behavior of The Others: They specifically reacted with aggression to the fact that Alice and I talked about writing a paper about her discoveries, and were enraged by my withdrawal of hospitality and immediately calmed down when I apologized and restored the

¹⁰ I am indebted to Rose for her advice. See Rose and the Whispering Voices in the present volume.





hospitality. This seems difficult to account for only in terms of the action of antipsychotic medication, and we wonder if this incident does give some indication of causal effects of our interactions with The Others, in both negative and positive directions. We have included this incident considering it as being of some value to evaluating the practice of hospitality that we discovered.

Evaluation in Early 2020

The Others no longer interfere with Alice's life. They have been very calm and content in my office since the latter part of 2019. As of March 2020, even when they are enraged or become active at home, Alice is not very frightened by it.

Alice has received antipsychotic medication throughout this exploration of hospitality with The Others, and even before we developed this particular approach. This medication has not had any significant effect on the presence of The Others in all the time I have known Alice up until we discovered their appreciation for hospitality. In the time that we have worked with this approach, we have been able to observe direct connections between our actions of hospitality or lack thereof and the level of aggression and interference from The Others. In early 2020 Alice evaluates the developments in her life in the past year and a half:

Alice: The Others aren't really a problem in my daily life now. They are there, but it doesn't interfere.

Christoffer: I have certainly noticed that for quite some time now, The Others have not interfered with our conversations here in my office. And they used to do that a lot. They would try to shut down the conversation more than once. If I recall correctly, they have not done that for several months, going back to at least late 2019. Is that correct?

Alice: Yes.

In February 2020 The Others no longer interfered at all during our conversations. Alice told me that there was a peaceful relationship between her and The Others now. This included her daily life, and not just at our meetings. When she felt bad now, it was not due to The Others, but because of other matters. Even when The Others wanted her to do something dangerous, it didn't really scare her. She called this a significant improvement. She gathered relations could worsen again. I suggested that if they did then our present knowledge of them may well give us the means to deal with such an eventuality and Alice agreed.

One of our practices over the past year has been to give The Others a sticker for every meeting where they have not attacked Alice. A small sticker if they remain reasonably calm and a big sticker if they do not violently interfere at all and are either just calm or engage constructively in conversation. We began to give them stickers in the beginning of February 2019. It was Alice's suggestion to do so as a way to help The Others learn to engage in a more calm and





friendly manner by praising them for getting it right. We kept this practice until March 2020, after which it was interrupted by covid-19 lockdown. I (Christoffer) have reviewed the booklet with stickers, and in that time of having weekly meetings, we have given The Others 38 big stickers. There are three small stickers. In addition, there have been a few occasions where they got no stickers – specifically at the time of my temporary withdrawal of hospitality. The booklet also contains a note from the very beginning of 2020 that states Alice’s evaluation at the time “for several months, The Others have been calm both at home and in Christoffer’s office”.

Christoffer: What is your impression of the causes of this change in your relationship with The Others? There used to be regular attacks, constant threats and commands to harm yourself or other people that before our discoveries did in fact lead to regular self-harm. You were hospitalized recurrently, including the use of physical restraint out of fear of self-harm leading to brain trauma. The Others constantly interfered and threatened you into silence. Now The Others engage in conversation and are calm and not frightening. You have received antipsychotic medication through all this time. What is your evaluation of causes here?

Alice: I don’t think it is because of the medication, because the medication has never worked before, and it would be very strange if it just suddenly had an effect.

Christoffer: What do you think has made this change then?

Alice: I think it is because of what I have done. I have gotten my life more together. I do things that I like and enjoy. I have friends now. And also because of what we have been doing.

Christoffer: From speaking with you on a regular basis from when you first got antipsychotic medication and through our attempts at dealing with The Others before we discovered hospitality and then practicing this hospitality over a prolonged period, I have the same impression. It would be strange if antipsychotic medication could suddenly account for this change in relations with The Others. And I believe we have seen an indication of causality when The Others and I fell out.

When Alice and I made the discovery about smoking breaks in May 2018, Alice had lost faith in having a future. She could see no life worth living ahead of her and expected to die in the near future. As of early 2020, Alice has a plan for her life and is working to develop the skills to realize it. She has friends, practices martial art, engages in creative activities and has regained her ability to read books. She does not perform self-harm and does not consider suicide. She was last discharged from psychiatric hospitalization in May 2018, which was just before our new discoveries and new approach.





Between November 2013 and May 2018, Alice was psychiatrically hospitalized 13 times. I have had weekly meetings with Alice beginning in February 2015 and from that time and up until the point where we discovered a new approach in May 2018, Alice was psychiatrically hospitalized 8 times (out of the 13 in total). After we discovered a new approach with inspiration from Max and Victoria in May 2018 and up till the time of writing (December 2020), Alice has not been psychiatrically hospitalized at all. She did come to the psychiatric emergency room in July 2019 and was offered hospitalization, but she refused and left the hospital. The reason for this episode was a period of feeling bad and being more vulnerable to The Others after having come home from exciting but also exhausting travels during the summer holidays. Alice was determined not to be hospitalized and she did slowly recover without it.

Christoffer: Would you regard our collaboration concerning living with The Others as being a success?

Alice: Yes. I think it is a success.

Alice on Therapy

The following consists of Alice's comments to the process of our explorations and the nature of our collaboration from a written correspondence with David Epston:

At first, I didn't want to speak with Christoffer, so I didn't say a word. Of course, I was too anxious to do so anyway. I expected him to give up on me after he would become impatient. Others had told me that it would not be helpful to speak to anyone. I assumed what they meant by that was that I would be a waste of resources. This was because no one had persisted with me for more than six months. One day, by coincidence, we found out that we both love anime and the movies of Hayao Miyazaki. That opened a door for our conversations to begin. Christoffer seemed very happy knowing this and as well it made me happy as well. At first, I was not comfortable speaking about 'Spirited Away' as it had scared me the first time I watched it. But since then I have come to appreciate it very much as it has proven very helpful for us. There was something else that was different about Christoffer. He never scolded nor was unkind to me when I was reticent as so many other professionals had. It took me at least three years to be reassured that he would be consistently kind as I had very good reasons for such skepticism. He reassured me that I was trying my hardest and did so explicitly and often. In other interactions with professionals, I ended up with a sense of not doing my best and as well being responsible for how badly I felt. He didn't discard me like others had. He didn't say I was impossible to help because I didn't progress immediately.

It took me a long time to get that impression because I was so afraid and nervous in the beginning. But that was not because of anything pertaining to Christoffer. It was because of the state that I was in and how I was feeling. But once he started giving The Others cigarettes, I thought, "okay this is different". Some time later, we really got to work with The Others and I experienced that Christoffer had a completely different approach to 'hearing voices'/magical

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beings in general. He didn't want to get rid of them!!! This surprised me a great deal. It was a positive surprise. He wanted for me to coexist with The Others because we both knew that getting rid of them would probably be too much to ask for at first - I've lived with them since I was a child and the earlier approaches to make them go away hadn't worked. I didn't know if it would work but I thought it couldn't hurt to try it. I had a lot of faith in Christoffer so if he thought it was a good idea, I thought I would go along with it. Still his approach to The Others baffled me as it was so different to the other professionals I have met. He gave me 'Max' and 'Victoria' to read and after that we made the discovery, more or less by accident, of the offer of cigarettes. And from there, we started making discoveries.

Closing Remarks

Alice and Christoffer kept the practice of treating The Others to a chair, cigarettes, coffee and a gory movie from mid-2018 and until Denmark entered lockdown due to covid-19 in March 2020. Since then, we have corresponded over the telephone and discovered that The Others, who at that time had been very calm and undistruptive for some time, did not react negatively although Christoffer could not extent his usual hospitality over the phone. In fact, it proved to not be necessary to maintaining the wellbeing of The Others at this time. As of December 2020, Alice very rarely visits Christoffer's office, and we only keep in touch over the phone. However, Christoffer's promise to The Others still stands, and at any time when Alice does decide to visit, he will provide the hospitality that he has promised The Others.

A striking and consistent element of this period of discovering a way for Alice to live with The Others, has been their response to basic hospitality. They have consistently expressed their satisfaction and joy with being offered cigarettes and coffee. It would appear to have been a game changing discovery. It may seem very odd indeed that a 'phenomenon' like The Others would respond to something like that. None the less, it consistently proved to be the case. In addition, Alice discovered that:

- It is easier to deal with The Others when they are not in her head. Knowledge about voices and talking to them assisted in this.
- Alice wondered if being kind to The Others and taking care of them could help The Others to evolve, perhaps even to become friends. Our experience seems to indicate that this is indeed possible. The Others did become calm and likable over time and increasingly desired friendship. They even gave Alice pleasant images of caring for her rabbit after having been introduced to such an idea during our explorations.
- Trying to understand The Others and not trying to get rid of them, made them easier to live with and made Alice feel significantly better.
- Responding to The Others in a mild and positive way provides a way to respond and be active in relation to them. Alice found this to be preferable to "just taking it" or fighting with them.





- Exploring ways of relating with The Others and getting to know them, created a sense of excitement and adventure that contributed to feeling better.
- Accepting that The Others are there, rather than rejecting them, provided Alice with a different approach that she found preferable as it made her feel better.
- She discovered at least part of the motivation for the aggression of The Others: They were suffering and wanted to die by means of Alice's death. Their suffering was related to being unable to express their aggressive energy through Alice.
- Gory movies and martial art seemed to provide an aggressive outlet for The Others, perhaps helping them to feel better.

I (Christoffer) wonder:

- What is the significance of such gestures of giving directed at 'magical beings'?
- Are 'magical beings' able to learn or evolve from observing and participating in practices of kindness, diplomacy and hospitality?
- Does the behavior of 'magical beings' depend to some extent on how the people they are attached to, as well as other people around them, respond to the 'magical beings'?
- Are some 'magical beings' in distress? And if so, is it possible to assist them to find peace of mind?

Acknowledgements

Christoffer:

I would like to thank Alice for allowing me to accompany her through this part of her life's journey and to thank her for her confidence in me. Knowing Alice is a great joy, and I have come to know her as a very considerate and caring person who has always treated me with great kindness. I am impressed and inspired by her courage in striving to find ways to co-exist with The Others and her persistence in the face of fear and despair. These explorations have been a huge contribution to my knowledge of magical beings and how to interact with them. I look forward to her further journeys with excitement. Thank you very much for collaborating with me to also make some of these discoveries available to other people by way of this paper. I hope and do believe it may help others.

I would also like to thank The Others for receiving my hospitality and appreciating my attempts to make them comfortable. Including their forgiveness when I have been clumsy and gotten things wrong at times. I really hope that I have managed to provide them with some peace and relief. I would also like to thank them for taking an interest in some of the things Alice is doing with her life. The Others have on several occasions expressed their interest in friendship with me, and I do truly hope that I may count them as friends and that Alice may as well. I have asked a lot of them at times and I hope to have provided them with some significant measure of respect, acknowledgement and relief in return. There will always be a place for The Others

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when Alice visits my office. My thanks also for their approval of this publication. I hope that their example may encourage others to explore respectful relations with beings like them.

Thank you Victoria, Max and Rose for sharing your knowledges of living with voices with Alice and me.

Alice and Christoffer would like to thank David Epston for participating in this journey of discovery. Thank you also to David Epston for his help work on editing this paper.

Consent

The name 'Alice' is a pseudonym. The person behind the pseudonym has been fully informed about my interest in publishing her story, and has given her consent for me to write it and expressed her desire for her story to be made available to others to inspire them to find similar ways of relating to voices. Alice has contributed directly to this paper by means of comments, corrections and she is also explicitly quoted in the text. Prior to submission and publication, Alice has read this paper and accepted it, and she has given her written consent for it to be submitted to a journal for publication.

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