



NPN

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In Memory of Dr Sandra Escher

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The articles are the views of the contributors and not necessarily those of NPN.

The History of the Hearing Voices Movement by Marius Romme & Sandra Escher

The most important meeting that I had was with Patsy Hage as a patient who asked me how she could learn to cope with her voices and this did make me realize that in psychiatry we are trained not to go into the experience of the hearing of voices which is very strange, I realized, because that is throwing away the baby with the bath water. Because in that way we did not know anything about the experience and that is how the situation is still the same to day with most psychiatrists in Psychiatry. Because I neither did not know anything about the experience. I asked Patsy to talk with another voice hearer about their voices. This was quite astonishing for me because they understood each other quite well. Only I was astonished about all the information they exchanged. I repeated this a few times with several voice hearers and they liked that. They liked to talk about this experience with each other. But it did not solve the problem of knowing how to cope with them. It became clear that they really heard these voices and they were strange voices for them also. There after we thought there might be someone in the world who would know how to cope. This brought us to Sandra because she had become interested. She had a relationship with a TV Talk show because the TV respects privacy and comes into every house. Sandra prepared the contact with the leader Sonja Barend and

with Patsy, so it would not become harmful and taken quite serious. That was an astonishing success because instead of a few people reacting. 700 people of 500 of whom heard voices themselves made contact and in this way we came into contact with voice hearers who were not troubled with their voices and some could even use them as a source of inspiration. This set of our interest in hearing voices research.

In the first study we compared the experience of the people troubled by their voices and the people not troubled by them. This learned us that the characteristics of the voices were the characteristics of an auditory hallucination as well in the patient group as in the not troubled group with whom we could not make a diagnosis. This comparison leads us to the conviction that the non troubled voice hearers really heard hallucinations and that they also experienced them as a sensory perception. This brought us to the necessity to accept voices as real perceptions.

This brought us to a study comparing again patient voice hearers with non troubled voice hearers. We then studied a lot of background issues and developed with their help an interview analyzing the experience into detail.

We learned that voices were a reaction to troublesome experiences, which they, as patients had not worked through emotionally well. In the non troubled group this relationship was not so strong there we found just also families who heard voices in different generations without the traumatic experience patient voice hearers

had suffered. From this research we learned that voices in patients have meaning coming from experiences in the life of the voice hearers. Especially in Patients the voices had a background such as “emotionally not working through terrible traumatic experiences”. In this study we also learned that each voice hearer had their own voices and not two voice hearers are alike. And these voices had the characteristics representing the problem they had suffered.

In the book “living with voices” in the chapter acknowledgements you can read about this develop of the studies as well as about the hearing voice movement. In the book Psychosis as a personal crisis (Routledge 2012) you can read in chapter 9 and 14 the analysis of the problems by making a construct and therapy plan and in Chapter 6 the interview written by Sandra Escher.

**Be Bold, Be Direct, Be
Together**

*How Sandra Escher
Changed My Life*

By Yann Derobert, founder
of the French HVN



Sandra & Yann Amsterdam 2016

- “A lot of writing!”. An impish look in her eyes, Sandra Escher is greeting me with these words as I check in at the first World Hearing Voices Congress in Maastricht. We’re in 2009, and I suddenly realize that my social phobia must have shown through the amount of emails I exchanged with her in order to prepare myself for my visit to the Netherlands for that most unusual event! To say the whole truth, part of this correspondence was also a way for me to verify that she was indeed the one answering. It was so surprising to me that I found it hard to believe. And there I knew it was true: she did answer, and she even remembered! That became a hallmark of what the Hearing Voices Movement would represent to me and constantly inspire me to be: accessible, reliable, trustworthy. And then I learned to know her more... To this day, the vivid memory of her, haranguing mental health workers to go through “all the questions” in the

Maastricht Interview – including the ones on sexual abuses and other bad treatments – sticks with me all the time. Sandra keeps reminding me to be bold and direct... or be useless. To me, her figure shines through the history of the Hearing Voices Movement weaving into its very fabric the principle that there is no such thing as mental illness as long as we keep looking at everything collectively. Of course, there is a powerful, scientifically sound, argument to be made against schizophrenia and psychosis as medical diseases. But were this not the case, the invitation Sandra launched to anyone interested to assemble and deal collectively with what ever presents itself to us would still hold the same strength and allow us, I believe, to overcome any challenge together.

When we met again at breakfast in Thessaloniki four years later, pointing to all the guests around us I told her: “Can you see all these lives you changed?”. Very humbly but with her eyes always sparkling she said“

“ One tends to shy away from this, but I guess that’s true”.



A small tribute to Sandra Escher

I never really knew Sandra. I was lucky enough to meet her at various conferences and Congresses relating to voice hearing and specifically children who heard voices. Along with Marius Romme she researched the subject of voice hearing experiences in a way that few others have done. She wrote with compassion and precision, bringing to light a topic and subject area that was previously largely neglected. I still have her remarkable book, "Young People Hearing Voices. What you need to know and what you can do" which she wrote in collaboration with Marius and contributed to by many thoughtful individuals.

It is a brilliant and helpful guide to the world of voices in the young. At the same time, it offers insights, wisdom and hope for parents and others in helpful roles, endeavoring to better understand and support youngsters who have these experiences. Every psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist and teacher, striving to be inclusive and helpful, ought to read and assimilate this knowledge and these perspectives into their own inner wisdom trove.

I saw Sandra as composed, elegant and filled with quiet determination. Clearly, her mission was to raise awareness and make a difference. Like Marius, she was a polar star in the firmament and a conversation changer whose work shines in the darkness and brings a topic from the shadows and out into the light. An inspirational figure for many of us in the Hearing Voices Movement.

I tip my hat to her and say thank you, for all that you did and all that still will be done and that you have made even more possible.

Ivan Barry, Berlin, Germany, 2021

Sandra Escher

How I will miss you.

I met you through my friends Peter Bullimore and Linda his wife . When I joined the hearing voices network way back in 2005. I had heard so many amazing things about you and your husband Marius Romme I thought to myself can this be true as you and Marius were professionals and in my experience up to meeting you both at that point I didn't have a great relationship with professionals as all they wanted to do was medicate me and say your experiences aren't real. But here you were Sandra this beautiful soul (you) embraced me for who I was and listened to my story and most importantly you never judge me. You created a lasting impression not just on me but for those you have left behind. And lastly Sandra you will never be far away as you are the rain in the clouds the grass that we walk on and the ocean everywhere. I won't say goodbye Sandra as I know one day we will meet again when it's time for me to collect my heavenly wings but until then my life is richer for knowing you and feeling blessed that you were part of my life xx

Kate Crawford National Paranoia Network

**In loving memory of the kind, strong and
uplifting Sandra Escher**

14 June 1945 - 31 May 2021



12 years ago, I saw Dr. Sandra Escher for the first time. I was a voice hearer, who after years of mental crisis and (forced) psychiatry, tried to build up his life again. I had recently picked up my previous study of psychology, writing a bachelor thesis about hearing voices. It was around that time that the first World Hearing Voices Congress was held in Maastricht. I attended the congress and a world opened up for me. I expected a congress full of professors and researchers giving lectures, but each day started with the impressive recovery stories told by voice hearers themselves. Without censorship these brave people talked about their struggles with traumatic experiences, hearing voices and mistreatment in psychiatry. They also talked

about how they had managed to learn how to live with voices and what had helped them on their path of recovery. The stories of these inspiring people made a big impact on me. I recognized a lot in their experiences and their ideals. This was my first introduction with what we in the Netherlands call "Experts by Experience".

Researchers and professors were also present, and they talked about voice hearing as a common human experience, as a natural variation, rather than an a priori presumed symptom of schizophrenia. They also talked about how childhood adversities is often an important cause of hearing voices and that the voices tend to point to these traumatic experiences. This insight made me realize that the difficult experiences I had as a child were connected to the voices I later experienced in my young adulthood.

In both my "career" as a psychiatric "patient" and my psychology education I was never told about these important insights. I left the congress deeply inspired and soon afterwards I decided that I didn't want to continue my master's in psychology. Going on would mean I would have to learn the DSM by heart. Instead, I wanted to develop myself as an expert by experience. I decided to get in contact with the kind and determined woman who at the congress had seemed very busy taking care of everything. This woman was Sandra Escher. Pretty much right away Sandra offered me opportunities to co-operate in a course about the Maastricht Interview and to join the editorial board of

De Klankspiegel, the magazine of the Dutch hearing voices organization Stichting Weerklank. Basically, she welcomed me in the worldwide tribe of the Hearing Voices Movement (HVM) that Marius and she started in 1987. Being an editor of the Klankspiegel enabled me to visit the next 4 World Hearing Voices Congresses and many other meetings. This enabled me to learn so much from so many inspiring people around the world. People who were facilitating an important change in both individual lives and in mental health care around the world.

I soon realized that many voice hearers, family & friends of voice hearers and mental health care workers could be helped immensely with all the valuable insights and practices that I discovered within the HVM. I wanted to create a place where people could find that kind of information and support. This led in 2012 to the founding of the first Hearing Voices Support Centre at RIBW N&R in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Marius and Sandra served as advisors. They gave me all the freedom I needed to develop a recovery and emancipation-oriented approach to hearing voices. Nine years later thousands of people have used the information and support we offer at the five Hearing Voices Support Centers that are now in the Netherlands. In every workshop, course or training we inform people about the foundations that Sandra and Marius laid for the Hearing Voices Movement. I think one of the most important contributions Sandra has made, was her journalistic approach. It was her idea for Marius and

Patsy Hage to go on national television and openly talk about hearing voices. Their call to viewers who had experience with voices to make contact after the broadcast led to hundreds of phone calls of voice hearers, both with and without a diagnosis. Sandra and Marius interviewed these voice hearers. Sandra's journalistic approach was to ask people about their experiences and life stories, instead of looking for symptoms and treatment targets that psychiatrists are used to. This allowed the voice hearers to (finally) talk about what has happened to them. Sandra approached them as humans with a story that was worth of listening to, instead of schizophrenic patients whose story didn't matter and who just needed to be drugged and put away in asylums. Sandra and Marius discovered and uncovered the insights I have mentioned earlier: Hearing voices as a variation and the need for emancipation, the relation between trauma and voices, the possibility of recovery and learning to live with voices, the value of self-help groups (hearing voices groups) and power of expertise of experience. In doing so, their work gave countless voice hearers back their lives. And I really think it also saved the lives of hundreds of people who otherwise might have committed suicide. For this reason, I really believe they deserve a Noble-prize. I have always experienced Sandra as a kind and powerful woman. She was kind in the sense that she was really interested in the life, experiences and stories of people. In contact she always communicated more as a friend or a family member,

then as a doctor, author or teacher. She was strong in the sense that she was fearlessly critical about the misconceptions and mistreatment happening in mainstream psychiatry. Her strength was also uplifting; she was all about empowering people who hear voices. Sandra's kindness was also reflected in the hospitality that Sandra and Marius have always shown. We spend many editorial meetings for De Klankspiegel in their nice home in Amsterdam. One of the first times we tried out the course that I had developed was partly held in the communal housing project where they lived. A few years I was glad and kind of proud to return the hospitality when I welcomed Marius and Sandra in our home when our first son was born. The last few years Sandra was experiencing more and more health problems. For many years she was in a lot of pain because of a horse riding accident, but she kept on working and living life to the fullest. Then Parkinson's disease came into her life, and she struggled more and more. The disease disabled her more and more. Every time I asked her how she was doing, she would clearly say "Not good". I felt really sorry for her...

I am really thankful you came into my life Sandra. The world needs more people like you. I hope your creativity, originality, idealism, strength and kindness will keep on lifting up the spirits of people around the world for many years to come.

Robin Timmer

SANDRA ESCHER

I am proud to say that Sandra Escher was a friend, she shares a special place in my life. She was one of the very few people in the world who could see beyond my anger, my hurt she could see beyond the wee vulnerable man/boy that first met her almost thirty years ago in a pub in Manchester following a hearing voices meeting. She spoke to me in a strange way, she spoke without judgement, she was above everything else curious about why my life was as it was. She helped me explore whom I was working with me in my early recovery to define that which had both disempowered and empowered me on my personal journey of healing. Alongside Marius they were the two constants in my life and though the first part of my journey was full of turmoil and self-destruction together they saw through this strange Scottish man of chaos and nurtured me for nigh on three decades so I could become me. Sandra has gone now who is she a mother, a wife, a grandmother, a daughter one of the strongest women I have ever met. Sandra was a healer she is my healer and will remain my healer forever. Rest in Peace dearest Sandra Escher.

Ron Coleman

I met Ron Coleman end of March 1998, we fell instantly in Love, at that time Marius & Sandra were like 2nd parents to Ron, he and they had just not long started Intervoice and there was a meeting planned at their house with the founders Ron, Paul Baker, Mike Smith, Dirk Corstens and Marius and Sandra. Ron asked me to come so about 6 weeks after we met, I was on my way to Maastricht. Little did I know that this was for Ron to seek approval of me by Marius & Sandra. Marius was wary of me at first as I was a clinical services manager in Mental health and he like most psychiatrists didn't like Managers, but I held my own in discussions and he warmed to me. Sandra was different though, right from the beginning she was warm and friendly, we bonded quickly, she was intelligent, quick witted and very open and honest. Our relationship remained the same throughout the rest of her life. She always remained supportive, we had a lot in common, 2 very strong willed, intelligent husbands, we were both strong willed intelligent females that had our own careers, we both chose to work alongside our husband's we both had our own idea's I feel what entailed was us both carving a way through by bringing our thinking into the mix. Both of us have always had curiosity at the heart of what we did, both liked to ask deep questions, both of us were

not afraid to challenge our husbands, when we on the odd occasion planned things together, we were a formidable team.

When I became pregnant with Rory, Marius & Sandra were thrilled and “adopted” Rory as a “grandchild” setting up a fund for when he turned 18. They planned to see him just after he was born and arrived 12 days after his due date, unfortunately he was 2 weeks late, so they missed seeing him Marius advising me to take a Valium and a hot bath !

I remember seeing Sandra after she had broken her ribs, she was in pain and had lost some of her spark, unfortunately it never healed properly and she was in constant pain, then the Parkinson’s came. She kept as strong as she possibly could, determined with the help of a physiotherapist to stay as mobile as possible, by this time they had moved to a lovely flat in Amsterdam, and we were able to have 2 family holidays there with them.

She could still be mischievous and fun but by the 2nd trip was often tired.

We spoke to her not long before her death it was obvious that the spark was nearly extinguished, although Ron did get her to smile, the Parkinson’s had

taken its toll on both. I will miss her personally but also her presence will be much missed in the Hearing voices world, she always had time for voice hearers. I will also miss her professional wisdom and guidance.

Dear Sandra may you rest in peace, knowing you have left loving grandchildren and a legacy of recovery for voice hearers around the world, especially your work on children who hear voices . I will miss knowing you were always there. Much love to you and heartache for Marius for the loss of his soul mate too.

Karen Taylor



We had the pleasure and privilege of meeting and working with Sandra and Marius in Sydney during their Australian Tour in December 2012. Sandra and Marius were so very generous with their time, and as well as doing some Voices training, they held an open forum for people with lived experience and their carers free of charge.

Both Sandra and Marius offered to wear Melissa Roberts Foundation polo shirts to the workshops to help promote what we do as part of the worldwide Hearing Voices Movement.

As well as the work, we had some wonderful and memorable social get togethers.

Sandra and Marius - true pioneers.

Bruce Roberts Melissa Roberts Foundation

Sydney, Australia

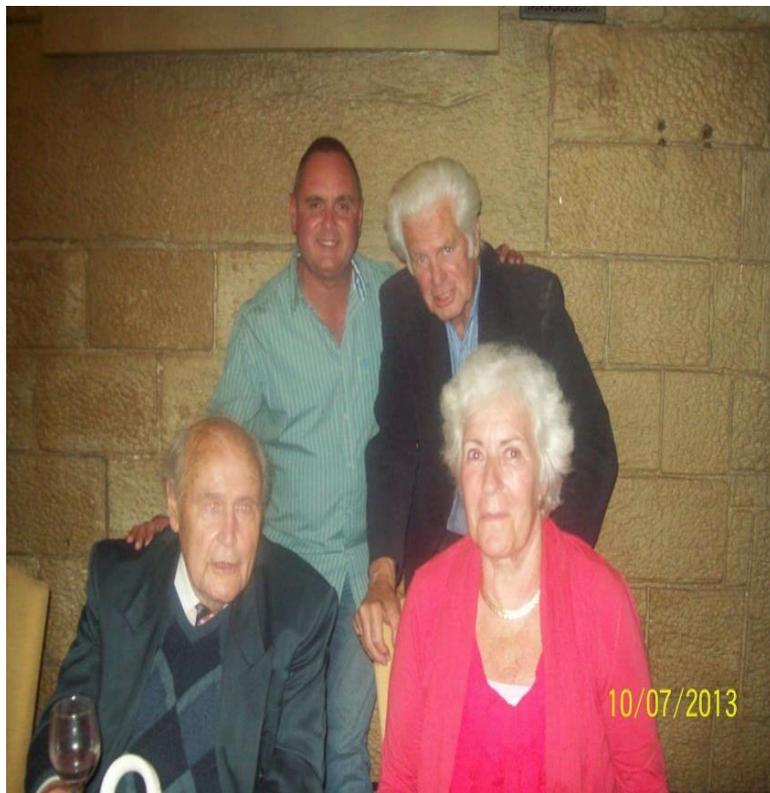
A Tribute to an Amazing Lady & True Friend

We have known Sandra for over 25 years as a friend and colleague, being a voice hearer myself I learned so much about my own experiences from Sandra she was also a great companion and support for my wife Linda. I first met her at a conference at Ashworth Hospital on Merseyside I listened with intensity at what she had to say, at that time I didn't have the confidence to approach her and say how much I had enjoyed her presentation. Through a mutual friend Dr Terence McLaughlin, I was introduced to Sandra and Marius and got to know them really well. We went to stay at their home in Belgium in 2004 to write the Maastricht Interview for Problematic Thoughts, Beliefs & Paranoia this is when I noticed how Sandra would tell you that she agreed with some points that you made she would give you a little wink of her eye. I would often say to Linda over the years of being with Sandra and working with her I think today went well I received the Sandra Escher wink. A really funny moment that I will always remember was when Sandra and Marius had delivered training in Sheffield, Marius went straight to Norwich to work the next day so Sandra stayed in Sheffield with us and Terry McLaughlin and his wife Julie, we gave them our apartment to stay in which at the time had a warden on it, if ever you needed assistance, you pulled a red cord and the warden would come onto the intercom. We had all had a lot to drink and Sandra got up during the night a little disorientated and pulled the

red cord by mistake and she heard a voice saying are you all right in there and she shouted Terence I can hear a voice and I do not know where it is coming from. There are so many fond memories that we have of Sandra. We also had the privilege of Sandra and Marius attending our wedding in 2014. The last time that we saw Sandra was November 2019 I had gone to do some work at their home in Holland and you could see that Sandra was in a lot of and discomfort, but she was still a great host finding time to speak to Linda as I worked with Marius. On the Sunday evening Sandra came to dinner with us and it must have been really difficult for her with the pain she was in. When we returned to their apartment I helped her into the lift with their little dog, Marius and Linda were walking slowly behind us as we sat outside the door waiting for them to arrive Sandra thanked me for helping her and gave me a Sandra Esher wink it is one, I will always remember and treasure as it was the last time unfortunately, we saw her. Sandra was a truly remarkable lady who helped so many people myself included. Thank you, Sandra, for all your hard work to help people who hear voices

Lots of Love Peter Bullimore & Linda Whiting

**A Great Night out in Sheffield with Sandra,
Marius & Alec Jenner**



World Hearing Voices Congress Important announcement!

Because of the ongoing uncertainties around travel, social distancing and limited opportunities for indoor gatherings, we have had to make the unfortunate decision to hold the 12th Annual Hearing Voices Congress from 1-3 September as a fully online event! Conference details at

www.hearingvoicesnetworkireland.ie The 'call for Papers' ends on 30 July. Book your place now! Very good value at £45 for voice hearers and students and £65 for professionals for 3 full days, including cultural and social events. Congress Registration at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/12th-world-hearing-voices-congress-cork-ireland-1-3-sept-2021-tickets-145886254715>

A New Online Hearing Voices Group in Ireland Facilitated by Michael RyMaastricht *Interview Training*

The Hearing Voices Movement offers a non-pathologizing, non-judgmental approach to supporting people who hear voices, see visions, feel tactile sensations, or have other unusual experiences. It is an approach that does not assume illness, and makes space for many ways of making meaning. The goal is not necessarily to get rid of voices or visions. In many instances, the focus is on understanding and integrating those experiences into a full life.

Online group spaces are specifically for those with personal lived experience with voices, visions, and negotiating alternative realities (versus allies or caregivers). The Online groups are voice-hearer founded and facilitated.



for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available online Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma

It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID 88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID 827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Monday Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group with Emma & Lyn On ZOOM 11am-12pm UK Time Meeting ID: 558 685 8263 Password 6DyVca