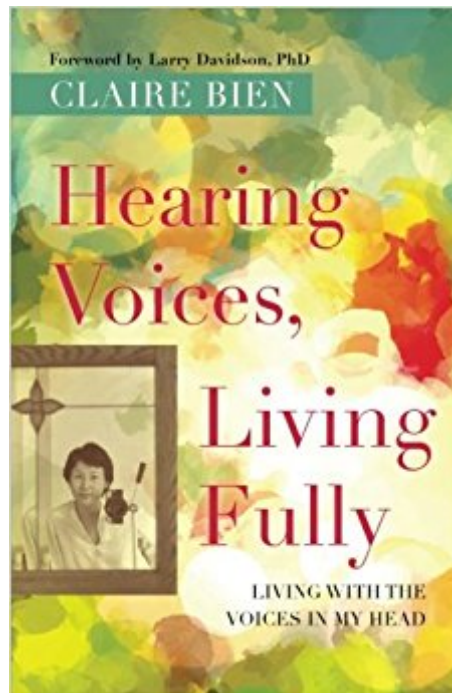




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# Hearing Voices, Living Fully: Living With The Voices In My Head



## Synopsis

When Claire Bien first began hearing voices, they were infrequent, benign and seemingly just curious about her life and the world around her. But the more attention Claire paid, the more frequently they began to speak, and the darker their intentions became... Despite escalating paranoia, an initial diagnosis of Schizophreniform Disorder and taking medication with debilitating side effects, Claire learned to face her demons and manage her condition without the need for long-term medication. In this gripping memoir, Claire recounts with eloquence her most troubled times. She explains how she managed to regain control over her mind and her life even while intermittently hearing voices, through self-guided and professional therapy and with the support of family and friends. Challenging a purely medical understanding of hearing voices, Claire advocates for an end to the stigma of those who experience auditory verbal hallucinations, and a change of thinking from the professionals who treat the condition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Remarkable and inspiring. In a clear and resonant narrative voice, Claire Bien tells how she struggled and eventually surmounted auditory hallucinations and severe emotional turmoil while living a full life: maturing in the first generation of a Chinese-American family, marrying, working full-time, and nurturing a son in a supportive family and community. -- Selby C. Jacobs, MD, MPH, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Public Health, Yale School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry Bien's memoir witnesses to the resilience of the human spirit and her determination to

live a full life, thus illustrating that a person is more than a diagnosis. Therapy, medication, relationships and work are all critical components that enable a person to regain a life despite debilitating symptoms. She is a woman of courage. -- Nancy Kehoe RSCJ, PhD, Author of *Wrestling with Our Inner Angels: Faith, Mental Illness and the Journey to Wholeness* This is a revolutionary book, written by Claire Bien, who has experienced and dealt with auditory hallucinations-latterly without medication. Now living with a son and successful career, it tells of her determination not to let the disease beat her. ...Some of the book can be graphic, as Claire provides a full picture of the 'degree of horror' such a condition can engender; however, she also provides hope of recovery, 'even the most horrifying and bizarre beliefs are not sign and symptom of an irreparably broken mind.' New York Journal of Books In this candid, informative memoir, Bien, a trained facilitator for the Hearing Voices Network, describes experiencing auditory verbal hallucinations throughout much of her adult life. Having eventually learned to manage this condition, she aims to bring hope to others in the same circumstances. Bien details the most difficult and embarrassing periods of her life, including the deaths of close family members and her two troubled marriages, both which ended in divorce. The book chronologically documents Bien's life from her early years, through college, to her struggle to find a vocational calling, alongside the time line of her voices: their first appearance, her first hospitalization, and her subsequent recoveries. Bien's tone is matter-of-fact and often rings flat throughout her comprehensive accounts; the sentences are mostly declarative and devoid of much emotion. Bien is lucid and calm in looking back at her life and battles, displaying an admirably unflinching self-awareness. She's able to understand how she "was primed to hear voices" by biological and life triggers associated with her condition, and her journey will appeal to others struggling to overcome or better understand the same affliction. Publishers Weekly

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"Hearing Voices, Living Fully: Living with the Voices in My Head", moved quickly through Claire Bien's childhood and young adult years, at a pace that reminded me of going through a friend's old photograph albums. There were a lot of people, places and things over a span of many years, presented in a relatively short number of pages. That pace helped give to a good understanding of Claire's background as it reached the most interesting part of the memoir. At the onset of Claire's symptoms, I was fascinated by the descriptions of the different voices and the roles that each one played. There were times where things got very dark and scary and at the same time, the world didn't stop turning. Claire tried to navigate the everyday challenges of being wife, mother and professional, while taking on challenges that no one else could see. This was an empowering story and could provide hope for people who struggle with similar issues. But I think this book could have a bigger impact on the friends and family members of those struggling with mental illness, as well as professionals in the mental health field.

Claire Bien's memoir is a remarkable invitation into the world of people who hear voices. I read the

whole book in 24 hours becoming completely absorbed in it. I was exhausted at the end and was in awe that she had the energy first of all to live her story, and then to tell it with such immediacy and feeling. I felt I was taking every step with her. I know that it will help those who hear voices and those of us who know and care about people who do.

I have read other people's memoirs of struggle - *The Quiet Room*, *The Unquiet Mind*, *The Center Cannot Hold* - all good but Clare Bien goes deeper in her analysis of her own experiences - both her ordinary and extraordinary - and is able to communicate those details and thoughts with pictorial language that gives me a sense of her mastery over her self. Not that she has all the answers but that she can navigate with some clarity and hope through her own rough waters. I also read this book in a matter of days and would put it first on my recommendations to others. She also brings me hope in the power of the mind to change voices.

Was very good information on this woman's life. Anyone who knows someone who is on this type situation should find this book good reading.

One cannot begin to review a person's memoir and give it a rating, especially one as intimate as Claire Bien's story of living with schizophrenia. I have personal experience with the topic of this book but won't go into any further details. At various points, I found Claire's story provocative, inspiring and scary. She tells us first hand what it is like to live with hearing voices, both good and evil. Claire had two major psychotic events which landed her in the hospital, has lived a life filled with psychiatric care but has chosen to handle her disease without medications. This memoir tells how she conquered the voices and learned to live with them while not relying on medication. She explicitly states, though, that the non-medication route is categorically not for everybody but that it can indeed work for many. This book has ultimately given me major incite into what one person's life is like living with hearing voices and shown me many avenues to explore about this condition. I do find the non-medication route to be one I am leery of and even after her last chapter describing her rational thoughts now on her current state of living with her full potential, I do hesitate to wonder what her life would have been like had she had access to the medications available today rather than the ones she experienced in the early eighties. This book has left me with a sense of wanting to read other personal stories, which I've been hesitant to do before, and also leaves me with a desire to write, myself. I will be reflecting on her story and accomplishments for some time to come. Put aside any misconceptions you may have and read Claire's memoir to find out how one person

can survive and even thrive whilst hearing voices within their own mind.

Claire Bien's Memoir, *Hearing Voices, Living Fully*, is a fast-paced, powerful, and moving story that captures the reader's attention. I admire her courage in writing such a life-baring story--she truly sliced open her life for all to see -- with all its human foibles, pain, and joys. It was like watching surgery. I'm sure she had pangs of doubt, as Kay Jamison did when she wrote and published *AN UNQUIET MIND*, wondering how it would be accepted and judged. Claire took that leap. Mental illness is the country's silent epidemic. Claire has humanized it and shown that the world would never guess how many people have it.. We need more voices like hers to end the silence and darkness about these very common and seriously disabling illnesses. As a NAMI Family-To- Family teacher, when I state NAMI's statistic that one in four families are touched by mental illness. I like to add that the other three families are keeping the secret. Claire's memoir was a powerful and courageous read.Marc D.

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