

The 3T's – Turning the Tide of Suicide

Coping With and Surviving Depression

Evening Lecture Series 2003

Transcript

Johnny McEvoy Lecture

Held On

Thursday 20th November, 2003

At

Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre

99-107 Pearse Street

Dublin 2

www.holidayinndublincitycentre.ie

Coping With and Surviving Depression Evening Lecture Series 2003

**Johnny McEvoy Lecture
Thursday 20th November, 2003**

Introduction by Professor Kevin Malone:

Good Evening everyone and welcome. Firstly, I would like to update you on the 3Ts activities over the summer. The campaign sent out an appeal to the golfing community of the island of Ireland to participate in the 3T's golf tournament launched by Pdraig Harrington in February 2003, through their local golf clubs in support of the new 3T's initiative - it was what we called a grass roots initiative. The golf tournament continued throughout the Summer and was very successful in all Clubs in Ireland and over 800 people took part and we figured that it would be appropriate as part of our strategy in terms of awareness, to put together an Autumn lecture series and so with this in mind we were very fortunate in a reasonably short period of time to get three fantastic individuals who were willing to share their story of their struggle and their survival with depression. Some of you will have heard, I can't remember if all of you were here or not, I can't remember all of your faces, Kay Jamison was over from the US and she gave a fantastic presentation on her life as a scientist and as a sufferer and a survivor of depression.

We then had Gareth O'Callaghan who was due to present about 4 weeks ago and at the very last minute, Gareth was unable to be here so I gave, at short notice, a scientific/American type presentation on the advances and developments in suicidal depression in more recent times so I'm glad to see you came back tonight and The Holiday Inn have invited me to MC because tonight we have yet another very special Irish individual, Mr. Johnny McEvoy.

Johnny is known to a whole generation of people who like a good ballad and he has made the good Irish ballad an International success around the stages of the world long before some of the more modern bands are out there doing their gigs, he was doing it long before all of that. What people didn't know for a number of years and what slipped out in an interview with Gay Byrne in 1986 was that Johnny himself had suffered from depression, manic depression as he explained in that interview, about three years later he did a TV series with Spike Milligan and John Ogden, directed by

Owen Harris, as far as I recall, called "Darkness Visible" in which he spoke about his depression and how he had coped with it and how he was dealing with it, not as if it was in the past, how he is dealing with it in the present and speaking with him here tonight, he is someone who deals with it in the present.

We are really privileged and honoured and I am delighted, so delighted, that he has been so willing when he got the call to say would he speak with us tonight and share his story, there was only one answer and that was "yes" and I am delighted that he showed up to the right Hotel, the Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre don't forget it, they are our proud sponsors and have been so good to us. So without further ado I am going to pass over to Johnny for his presentation.

There is one housekeeping thing, we don't have a date for Gareth O'Gallaghan who still says that he definitely wants to give a presentation, December is not good so we are going to try and set it up for January, so anybody who didn't put an email or phone number or anything on this sheet the last day we were here if you just stick it on it and we will notify you as soon as we have that date and obviously we will put the publicity out through the usual channels as well.

So, can you please welcome Mr. Johnny McEvoy.

Johnny McEvoy: Thank you Kevin, Good Evening, I'm the cabaret act.

I promise not to depress you too much. I have been asked to speak to you tonight to tell you about myself and my experiences with manic depression, because I am a manic depressive and I remember when I was first told that how frightened I was by the word manic, I could accept the depression bit but the word manic was absolutely terrifying because I really didn't know much about it and the word was terrifying but I am in good company because people like Winston Churchill and Spike Milligan who I knew and Abraham Lincoln, even Michael Collins were all manic depressives so I am in good company. I'm not as frightened of it now today as I was back then and that's why I went public with it in '86 with Gay Byrne on his programme because I felt I owed it to people, I was in a position where I could talk and I felt I owed it to people to let them know it is not as bad, although it is quite bad most times, but you can live with it and you can survive with it.

My first experience with depression was, I think I was about ten years of age and children do suffer from depression, even dogs suffer from depression and I used to come home from school, I remember on dark winter evenings, and I'd curl up on my father's armchair and I'd cry my eyes out for about an hour. My poor mother didn't know what was wrong, she used to put it down to school sickness she called it, and just growing pains, but nobody talked about it. I didn't understand why, I was crying for no reason because I had a perfectly happy childhood and a happy home, loving mother and father, close family, so there was no reason for me to feel that way but I used to cry and I never knew why.

I went through my teen years very happy, very free, like all teenagers, thought I was invincible, thought I was going to live forever, and through those years I discovered I could sing, and I found great happiness and great relief in singing, until I reached about 21 and I achieved a sort of very instant success with a record that I recorded in 1966, I was only 21 and it seemed, instead of making my life better it made my life absolute hell, because it was like a catalyst, I was going from singing to a group of people, maybe 10 or 20 people, and suddenly I was playing to 2,000 people a night, 6 nights a week, almost 52 weeks of the year and I discovered I could stand up and sing to 2,000 people no bother, when I came to talk to 2 afterwards, I couldn't do it. I'd lock myself in the dressing room and I'd spend hours before the show or after the show just sitting on my own or I'd travel for miles all over the length and breadth of Ireland in a little Volkswagon car with a driver and I would sit for maybe 5 or 6 hours going to the venue a concert somewhere in Donegal or in Kerry and I wouldn't talk, I couldn't talk to him, I'd just look out the window and things started to affect me, simple things like crows cawing or stone walls of Galway would always make me feel very lonely and very sad and this was a strange feeling to have because all around me people were relying on me, managers, road managers people in the business, publishers and they were all relying on me for their living and here was I, I couldn't communicate with them, but I could on stage, and this went on for a long, long time.

Again, I didn't know what was wrong, I thought everybody else was out of step with me, that I was okay but everybody else was wrong and eventually I met my wife to be and we got married in 1970 and things were no better, I think she knew something was wrong and hinted at it on many occasions but I started a band in that

same year and it meant even more work and more travelling around England, Scotland and Wales, and again all over Ireland and I was physically exhausted most of the time to the extent that I virtually collapsed for no reason. I was doing a television programme, I was having these black thoughts all the time and terrible morbid thoughts, thoughts of death, and I used to listen to records I collected very rare records of Dylan Thomas, and I used to listen to him in a dark, dark room at home and he would be going on and on about death and dying and lost childhood, all this sort of thing and God knows it was making me worse than I was. My wife of course was at her wits end because she didn't understand these feelings I used to have and I remember coming home in the early hours of the morning in the mid to late 70's and I used to come in at 5 o'clock after a long journey home. My day would take up 15 hours, I would be gone from the time I left until the time I came home for 15 to 16 hours a day, so it was a lot of time away from home and my children were very young and I used to come in about 5 o'clock, 6 o'clock sometimes and I'd go into the downstairs loo in the house and I'd stand looking in the mirror and I'd see this pale face looking back at me and I'd say to myself, you know, lord you've got everything going for you, you've got a lovely wife and two lovely kids, a successful career, I had number 1 records in the charts, I had a band and these guys were working for me and I wasn't working for anybody else, I was my own boss, I could decide my own, as I thought, my own destiny and I'd look in the mirror and I'd say, I even own my own house, I'd no mortgage and I'd say why am I so unhappy, why this terrible burden on my shoulders, why this horrible cloud that descends on my head and I'd head off for work or I'd lie awake, couldn't sleep, tossing and turning, and then there was a terrible anger as well which I couldn't understand, this thing would anger me and I had this terrible anger inside.

My father was then diagnosed with cancer, Hodgkin's Disease which I knew nothing of either and I was the only son at home and my mother was in the early stages of Alzheimers and we didn't know, she wasn't able to cope with it and didn't understand what was happening to him. I knew, I was told straight out that it was cancer and he only had a couple of years to live, and that acted as another catalyst, I became even more angry and dangerous to myself in the way I was living, I was drinking very heavily, I was social drinking. At that time you must remember in the 70's it was different to now for somebody in my position in show business, going to a hotel like here or a pub or a cabaret lounge somewhere around Ireland, first thing you

would be greeted with when you walked in the door, the owner or the barman would say would you like a pint, will you have a drink, it was very easy to get it, so I was drinking a pint beforehand and then a pint turned into a glass of brandy and then there was two brandys beforehand and I wasn't singing as good as I thought I was. Afterwards, the band would meet and get together and we'd have the release of the tension, the nerves of the show and we would drink more and then it got to the stage we were getting carry-outs and taking it into the van and drinking more going home and getting into the car and driving home and things like that. What I couldn't understand was that, even on a night when there wasn't much drink and I might have only 2 pints, I couldn't understand how I suffered more than they did the next day with hangovers, I could never understand it, how bad my hangover was and how I'd sit in the van and we would be going somewhere, they'd all be talking and laughing and smoking and I'd be sitting there and tears would come into my eyes and I couldn't understand this, what is it that was happening to me.

As I said, even the sight of the stone walls in Galway would remind me of my father and I'd go into a deep depression. I remember standing outside a dance hall in Galway one night not knowing where I was, I didn't know where I was, I was going to play there that night and I didn't know where I was, didn't know what part of the country I was in because I had been in such a mood coming down in the van. I was not aware of what was going on around me outside of my head. All I was concerned with was what was going on in my head and it was like a black, black lump of dough that was inside my head and that it had solidified and blocked out all the outside world and all I was left with was this blackness that was surrounding me and it came to '79 and my father died, eventually, and my wife said to me one day – we went out for a drink, this was the last night I had a drink, to the hotel in Dalkey. I was sitting down having a half pint of Guinness, and she said, I will be away tomorrow. My sister was there as well who also suffers from manic depression, my sister was there and her husband and my wife said I'll be going off tomorrow as you know for a couple of weeks, and I slammed the half pint of Guinness down on the table in anger, fierce burning anger inside of me, and this was the first I heard of it, I thought, she had told me a long time before that that she was going to visit her sister in Galway and that she was going to be gone for two weeks.

But she said the next morning when she was going, she said – I woke up the next morning in a lather of sweat, I woke up with a terrible anxiety attached and I remember the sun shining in through the window, I didn't rise early, I don't rise early in the morning, I'm not good in the mornings and because of years of habit of getting in late at night, I don't get up that early. She was up and had the kids dressed and I said where are you going. She said I told you I'm going to see my sister in Galway for two weeks for a break, I've got to get away because I can't take it any more and she said really what's more, she gave me an ultimatum, she said that if you don't go and see somebody about what's wrong, there is something very badly wrong with you and if you don't seek help, help was the word she used, I'm not coming back.

That was a terrible shock because this was the first I knew of it, although she had told me and it was obvious to everybody else, it was very obvious to my sister, it was very obvious to my brother in law, it was obvious to my young children that something was wrong and I jumped out of bed and I followed her up the road in the car, up to the roundabout in Glenageary and I lost her in the traffic and I turned around the roundabout and came back home and the first thing I did was lift the phone and I rang a Psychiatrist, attached to John of Gods and I said, I think I have a problem and he made an appointment for me for the next Tuesday.

I headed off to drive to Tramore that night to a gig down there and I drove down and I said to myself, I won't have a drink tonight I'll just let it pass. The next night came I was in Killarney, the Gleneagle, and I thought I won't have a drink tonight I'll just let it pass, and one night led to another and a week went by and I realised I had no more hangovers. A week went by and I went to see Dr. Cinnamon and I told him how I felt, he said were you drinking and I said a fair bit. He said well okay he said from what you're telling me I think you are a manic depressive and that is when I first heard the word manic depressive. I probably heard it used before for somebody like Edgar Allen Poe so I had this terrible image, I got a terrible fright because I had this terrible image of being locked away, my grandfather also had it and unfortunately in the days he had it in the '20s there was no medication at that time for it and he ended his days in the mental hospital in Ballinasloe and I had this image in my mind that here am I going to end my days in a mental institution somewhere locked away from my children, locked away from my wife and all the people I love

and I was absolutely terrified but he said, you know we can control this with medication and he put me on medication and I went home.

My wife rang that afternoon and she said had I seen someone and I said I had and I told her what he said, that in his view I was manic depressive and that I probably would, not probably, would always be manic depressive and that it could be controlled by medication and care and she said I will be back tomorrow and she arrived back the next day and she's been with me ever since. That was all of 23 years ago and she's been through real bad times and good times too.

But, I drove to, again I was playing in Tramore that night, it was a Tuesday night, I drove to Tramore and I felt quite elated at this stage and I went on and sang that night, I didn't stay late because I was driving home, I drove home and got as far as Arklow and had to pull in and I spent the next hour crying in my car at the side of the road and everything just poured out of me, it was quite a low. But I made up my mind that night afterwards that I would try and do my best with it, and I certainly wouldn't drink again.

I was talking to Kevin before we came on and the reason why I don't drink is because drink and depression are a very lethal mix. I know for a fact that if I was to take a drink now whatever willpower I had with the illness would disappear and I think there would be only one outcome and I would end up destroying myself and that's a very frightening thing to say and it's something I believe very deeply and I don't need a drink, I don't want it anymore anyway, I don't think about it anymore. But I wanted to tell you about - the highs were quite high, it was like as someone once said, sliding down the rings of Saturn, feelings of well being, feelings of - I started to write songs around that time and I found I could get the ideas for the songs, the idea would come to me in a moment or period of depression but I was usually too tired or too fatigued to do anything about it but when I was coming out of the depression and going into the elation which would follow it sometimes, most times, I could write down the ideas I got when I was depressed, so I would sit writing songs and I found this a great relief. Unfortunately, a lot of the songs were very down and depressive as well but I made no excuse because I said that's the way I am and that's how I write and if people like it they'll listen to it and if they don't like it they'll let me know pretty quick and I'll be able to tell very quickly on

stage whether they like it or not and I am glad to say that most of them they do like and most of them people ask for them.

As for the highs, I went through about £10K once, I don't know where it went all I know is that one day I had it and a few weeks later it was gone, I bought a car once that was completely inappropriate for what I wanted. It was too small, it was a little Opel Manta, I had two young children, I had my wife and my mother who was a widow then and I was supposed to bring them all around in this small little sports car and it was a sort of a very early mid-life crisis I was going through. I actually don't remember the day I bought it, I don't remember going into a sales room, I don't remember paying the money for the car, I don't remember buying the car but I was stuck with this car wherever I bought it and I thought it was great I thought I was young and free and I had no responsibilities, I was carefree. Anyway that didn't last long, you realise afterwards, and in a fit of depression I sold the car.

What I want to talk to you about probably the most traumatic day of my life which occurred in 1999, in June 15th 1999 because I've had bouts of depression off and on in all those years and bouts of elation. I am on medication, unfortunately I am also allergic to the medication which means the medication works for a while and I become allergic to it and I have to go on another one, and I've tried almost every single medication in the book at this stage, I think I'm on the last one, and it's working fairly well for me at the moment, it might not be obvious but it is, but anyway I was on a certain medication in 1999 and we had moved house in 1998 and we made what was a mistake really in that we didn't know that the new house was being built and we had to find somewhere else to live and it all took a lot longer in the end, with builders, and in the end it took 2 years. So we went back to live in the old house I grew up in in Clonskeagh, I still own that house and we moved back there. My daughter went to Australia which I found very hard to take and it was very lonely going away, my son was still living at home and we moved back to the house but unfortunately it brought back a lot of memories of those dark days of my childhood, and here I was once again sitting in the armchair, crying on a winters evening, one evening in particular when I was in the house on my own and I sat in the chair with my head in my hands and I wept and wept and felt in total despair. And I thought and I could've sworn and still swear to this day that I heard my

mothers footsteps coming to the door. I don't know whether it was but I like to think she did come.

But one day, the 15th June 1999, I was feeling pretty desperate and I woke up and I was really in despair at this stage, there was no sign of the house being finished, my wife had taken over the looking after of the building of the house, I wasn't able to do it and it had followed a very manic state of furious writing, of waking up, of being unable to sleep really, in a way tossing and turning being unable to sleep, sweating, perspiring and then sitting up in bed getting an idea, grabbing a piece of paper, a notepad, I wrote short stories, I wrote poems, I wrote songs in this manic state.

I found myself at 5am one morning out in the back garden cutting the grass, so I thought God, you're in a bad way now. I was running around like a chicken without a head. I was cutting grass at 5 o'clock in the morning with an electric flymo so I didn't care about the neighbours, that didn't enter into it and then I'd go back to bed and I was writing furiously and ideas were pouring into my head and I was never more creative in all my life and then bang, suddenly it all stopped and I crashed down totally depressed and this morning I woke up in absolute despair.

The day before I had been down in the American Embassy, I was going to America for a festival and I was down in the American Embassy and I remember sitting in the American Embassy and there was about as many people there as here tonight and I thought they are all going off to a new life, all these people were going off to a new life in America and here am I, I had nowhere to go, I felt no part of it, I felt totally cut off from all these people and I went through the whole motions of getting my visa, passport stamped, left and went back home. I don't remember going to bed that night but I woke up with this utter feeling of despair and I had an appointment with the dentist and I headed off, I remember looking at my wife, she was still in bed as I was leaving, it was an early appointment, and I remember looking back at her and saying I might never see you again and I thought, I will never see you again.

I went into the dentist anyway to find out I had arrived a day too early and it was really, people wonder about suicide and suicidal thoughts and people say afterwards, if I'd only said this, if I'd only said that, maybe if I shouldn't've said this, shouldn't

have said that, if I had been there, you know, why wasn't I there to help, all I can tell you is that I came very near the edge, I came within a hairs breadth of it and all the words in the world wouldn't have stopped me.

The straw that broke the camel's back that morning was the dentist, the fact that I had arrived a day too soon, I left the dentist and drove home with the intention of taking my own life. I had every intention in the world of taking my own life. My wife had gone to town at this stage, I drove to the Bank, I fixed up the visa, I paid off the visa, why, I don't know, it wasn't that much, I had other things more important to think of and they didn't enter my head at all, nothing about the responsibility of what was going to be left behind me if I succeeded, nothing about the pain I was going to cause my wife and children, nothing like that. I didn't think of my mother, I didn't think of my father, nothing like that, I was brought up a Catholic but I didn't think of the unforgivable sin of suicide, that despair, the unforgivable sin, how can you say that, how can despair be a sin.

I stood in the bank and again it was like the American Embassy I was looking at all these people and I, it was like I was in a cocoon or a bubble, I was shielded from all these people, they had nothing whatsoever to do with me and never would, never again, and this bank would never have anything to do with me ever again and this car I am sitting in is no longer mine and this house I'm going into is going to be my death bed and I went through the motions, I went to the chemist and got my medication, I came home and went into the house and into the bedroom, it was like as if a part of me I had never known before to exist had taken over my body and soul and mind and all I wanted was to end this terrible pain I was going through all the time. It wasn't self pity, there were no feelings of self pity and it was just a feeling of total loss, I was totally lost, I was just drifting down this slope, I was going down, down, down, into the black pit and all I wanted was oblivion.

I didn't want a life after death, I didn't want heaven or hell, I didn't want any of that, I didn't think of it, all I thought of was oblivion and I got the tablets, got them all together and put them on the side of the bed and in the end, I don't know what happened but I didn't have the strength to carry it out, I was so totally exhausted, I just lay down on the bed, my wife came home early and she knew there was something very badly wrong and I spent the next three weeks in John of Gods

because I was suicidal and I was a danger, now like my poor grandfather, I was now a danger to myself and I still am.

I don't know, I had never felt that low in all my life, even when my father was dying, even when my mother went through 10 years of Alzheimers, going out to visit her in the nursing home, she didn't know me for 10 years, never spoke my name in 10 years and watching her fade away was not as bad as that morning and it changed my life and I am not going to tell you it made my life better, it didn't make my life better, it made me a bit more fatalistic I suppose, and it helped me accept the illness a bit better. I spent the three weeks in John of Gods, a lot of time to think, I grew a beard strangely enough, I don't like beards, I hope there's nobody with a beard here tonight, especially not the ladies, I just don't like beards, but I just grew one, because I felt I couldn't look at that person in the mirror, not only could I not look at them, I couldn't recognise that person in the mirror. I dropped down to about 9 stone in weight, wasn't able to eat, sleep was out of the question, for the three weeks I was in John of Gods I was knocked out basically, I don't remember those three weeks.

I left and I got through the summer – that depression lasted for the best part of three years, I never really got a high for that time but I was in a depression for that time but I took the medication and of course it worked for a while and then suddenly I started to get side effects and was taken off that and put on something else and I got side effects off that and all I can say is that, after that incident I really came to terms with the whole illness of manic depression, that I've got it and I've got to put up with it and there are going to be more days like that when I'll feel or I'll probably feel like doing away with myself, but I don't think I can do it really, I didn't do that time and I don't think I'll ever do it. I've got great support you see I've been very lucky in my family and families of people who suffer from depression suffer greatly as well, they don't suffer depression but they've got to put up with all these negative thoughts, all these terrible sad moments, the doom and gloom of, I don't know if you've seen paintings by Lowry, of the match stick men and women with their heads down and often I'd be walking down the streets, it used to be Dun Laoghaire, now it's Bray, and I'd catch a glimpse of myself in the window, I'm still not too old to look at myself in the window, and I'd see this head down in the window and I'd say come on try and get out of it and I'd find myself standing in the Bank again and all the old

thoughts would come back, but it hasn't been as bad as that day, that 15th June 1999.

All I can say I don't know if there's anyone here who suffers from the same thing, I hope maybe this helps a little, it helps me to talk about it and I won't go much further now than to say at the moment I seem to be okay, at the moment things are going reasonably well but I don't know at any one stage if it's going to come back or when it's going to come back but I think my wife could tell you quicker than I could.

I met someone the other day, a friend of mine from the North of Ireland, I was playing up in Newry, and she told me she had been in London for a weekend with her husband and he was off at a match and she took an overdose in the hotel room and she talked about the feelings beforehand - she was discovered by a priest who had made arrangements to pick her up the next morning, he came back early, he felt that something was wrong, he came back in his car and the manager of the hotel opened the room and they found her, she was taken to hospital and they saved her. I found in talking to her that her thoughts were much the same as the ones I had that day and I suppose with depression and manic depression, all forms of depression, even reactive depression, even though it goes away it can be pretty bad when you have it as well and suicide does enter the mind and I suppose it is the ultimate freedom from it.

I hope it never gets that bad again, that's all I can say but the people who had to go through that somebody taking their own life, it's a dreadful thing but blaming yourself is not the way out of it and sometimes I think I can feel and understand when I hear of somebody taking their own life, of what they actually went through in the last few moments of their life.

I think we're going to have some questions now, Kevin.

That's all I really have to say but if you want to ask some questions fire away and I will do my best to answer you.

Prof. Malone: You can read text books until you are blue in the face but there's nothing like bearing witness to somebody's personal testimony through the highs and lows and coping with them and I guess the final point you made Johnny about

accepting and living with it, as your family had done, I think is a very powerful message so I'm not going to ask any questions, Johnny's willing to discuss and take comments and questions from the floor and if you just put up your hand and I'll pass the microphone around.

Question: I just wanted to ask you, I used to think there was always a reason for it, looking for a reason, looking at maybe my husband, I couldn't figure it out but now I'm beginning to understand that there is no reason to it, but do panic attacks and anxiety attacks, do they come hand in hand with it ?

Johnny McEvoy: Yeah, with me they do, although they say anxiety is a different illness to depression itself but they do go hand in hand – they're part of it, certainly with me I get terrible panic attacks and terrible anxiety attacks and the strange thing about the anxiety and depression, I would much prefer to have depression, I would much prefer to feel depressed than the anxiety because you are so vulnerable when you are anxious and you are anxious over nothing most of the time.

On stage, I no longer get stage fright but I would get panic attacks on stage, I get panic attacks at any time, anywhere, in the supermarket even, but the anxiety can last for days and for weeks even.

Question: So how do you get yourself out of them Johnny ?

Johnny McEvoy: I just go with it, I just try and convince myself that there's nothing really to be that worried about but you see, the medication helps as well and with manic depression you have to take medication, it's not going to go away on its own unlike reactive depression, I'm sure you know that, which will eventually clear itself and you'll heal yourself but with the manic depression you have to take medication or get treatment for it and so if I get a very bad period of anxiety where I can't sleep and wake up in the morning perspiring I will go back to the doctor and say I'm going through a bad time what can you do and he'll change medication, juggle it around a bit or take the old faithful, the old valium now and again which will help clear it for that time being anyway. But I find acceptance is probably the best thing of all, accept that it is a panic attack, accept that it is an anxiety attack and it is, these things you are afraid of are not really real and I'm on anti-psychotic drugs

which they use for schizophrenia which they've discovered now also help depression and anxiety and I find that's working for me at the moment, I haven't had an anxiety attack in about three months and that's pretty good going for me as I would have it quite regularly.

Question: How long were you in denial ?

Johnny McEvoy: I think up to the time my wife said she was going to leave me – I was denying it pretty much all the time then. I don't deny it now, I've got it and I've got it badly. From about the time I was 21 up to 1979 I was, from '66 to '79 I was denying it, that I wasn't the one that was wrong, I was right all the time and everyone else was wrong.

Question: Did you ever go through a stage where you were trying to change the world ?

Johnny McEvoy: Oh yeah, I do that every night. I do yes.

Question: You said there a few moments ago that your depression lasted about 3 years, in those 3 years were you able to act normally or, would people have known, would your family have known ?

Johnny McEvoy: My family would have known, they would know, like you know sleeping for long times, staying in bed, unable to get up. The mere fact of having a shave was an insurmountable mountain, to get out of bed to have a shave, wash my hair, have a shower, to do something like that, I couldn't do it, just lying there and then going through the day and saying to Odette, I've got to lie down, I've got to go back to that bed and you just close yourself off from everything. Those 2 years spent in Clonskeagh, they are just a black period of time in my mind even today, there were times I was happy and I was okay but the depression seems to have taken up most of those years and as I said, I would spend all this time in bed and totally unproductive. In fact to wash up or to wash I couldn't do it, to cut the grass, I couldn't do it.

Question: I think you are a very brave man to get up and talk in front of everyone like this but I can identify an awful lot of what you're saying. I'm also from Dun Laoghaire, I also go to Dr. Kenneth Cinnamon, I'm schizo-effective, I'm not manic depressive but there is so much you have said that makes sense to me. I remember before I got married, I've two children as well, before I got married a weekend when my mother and father were away, going to bed pulling the covers over my head and not wanting, not getting up not eating or drinking my sister had to walk me to the toilet because I couldn't get out of the bed.

Johnny McEvoy: Because it is a debilitating disease, there's no doubt about it and again it's acceptance as well, you have to accept that that's the way it works. The thing that frightens me about the illness is and I just want to bring up the idea of my almost attempted suicide, was that it's the only illness that I know of where the person who suffers from the illness wants to destroy themselves. You know, my mother was diabetic and never through her life did she feel the only way out of diabetes is to take my own life, you know, but depression is. Again acceptance too makes it a little bit easier - you're in good hands too.

Question: My name is Betty Murphy – I can't remember, a good few years ago I was suicidal and I battled with it and battled with it and I fought it and I won, and I didn't commit suicide and I won, I go to therapy and I find it very hard to get out of bed in the morning, half past nine would be the latest.

Johnny McEvoy: Mine was often 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock

Question: If I'm with my sister at the weekend it could be 12 o'clock but ..

Johnny McEvoy: Again that's all part of it – I'm sure Kevin could explain it better, it's just the serotonin aspect of it that's just not working right and you just go into hibernation really and that's just basically what we do and we escape through that.

Question: I'm on 8mm 4 times a day and it's working very well I've been on it close to 10 years.

Johnny McEvoy: That's good I'm glad they're working well anyway.

Prof. Malone: I suppose one of the messages you're giving Johnny is that even though acceptance is a big part, it's a treatable illness and I suppose when you go back to talk about your grandfather in the days when nothing could be done

Johnny McEvoy: Well I never knew that life, but I think we are all very lucky that we're living in an age where it can be treated and can be controlled and when it is under control you can live a normal life, whatever normal is, somebody tell me please.

Prof. Malone: Can I take a couple of questions at the back as the people at the front got first dibs.

Question: You have been very successful in your singing and song writing, you've played all over the world, is there nights when you are on stage that you feel like you want to walk off ?

Johnny McEvoy: Oh, yeah, there are. They would be due mainly to anxiety, anxiety attacks, if I was going through a bad stage of anxiety or panic I would bring that on stage with me where it would reach a stage where I've got to, it happened quite recently where I felt I was just not doing what I should be doing. I wasn't performing to the best of my ability, I always felt down through the years that I always perform to the best of my ability and it hasn't always been the best or that good, and I felt one night recently that I wasn't, I can't go through it, I have to do two hours on stage so it's a long time to be even standing in one spot for two hours, and I felt about half way through it that - I can't go the whole way - but I've never once walked off stage so I'm not going to do it now at this stage but again, it was the anxiety more than the depression. I find when I go on stage and my wife finds this very hard to understand and I can understand why she feels that way too because I don't understand it either, because I could be in the depths of the blackest deepest depression and I'll still get up on stage and I'll still sing for two hours and no one will know and how I do it, I don't really know, I think maybe it's just adrenaline, maybe it's just the good endorphins that are released when you're singing because singing is a physical act as well as, you are using your body to breathe and deep

breathe and project and doing that can bring on a feeling of well being and you hope when you're feeling well you'll communicate that to the audience as well, so that's how it works really – it's all a big con – but unfortunately 2 hours afterwards on the way home it hits you again so you're back down again.

Question: Did you lose any of your friends or your relatives along the way, that they truly didn't understand or believe. What do you say to people like that ?

Johnny mcEvoy: Yeah, I know what you mean. I probably lost more friends when I gave up drinking, as people will find because they are drinking friends. I did lose some, not my family though my family were very supportive always, everybody in the family, my nieces, my daughter, my son, my wife, my sister, my sister's husband very supportive of me and as I mentioned my sister suffers from exactly the same thing so we can work off each other at times, when she's not well I can give her the support and when I'm not well she supports me. Friends - I did lose some friends but if I lost them then they weren't friends, so why worry about it.

Prof. Malone: We have to capture the moment and give appreciation for Johnny and his story.

Applause.

Prof. Malone: We also want to thank him for contributing to this open lecture series which has been sponsored by the Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre who have, as I say, are our proud sponsors of this initiative and they have given us, as you know who have been here before, nothing but support, hospitality, encouragement, warmth and we should acknowledge Fintan who has set up the room tonight and who has taped this so we will be able to edit it in due course. Thank you Fintan and the staff of the Holiday Inn. As previously, they have invited us for a cup of tea in the Bar once we are finished here.

I want to make one final announcement and it's a piece of good news, we are always up to something new, the latest project that has come to fruition in the last couple of days, one of or possibly RTE's greatest sports broadcasters, Jimmy Magee, is celebrating 50 years of sports broadcasting and he has put together a video of

great sporting moments that he has been privileged to be involved in over the 50 years in the form of a video and DVD. The 3T's has offered to underwrite some of the costs involved in this, particularly on the public relations side and on the development side and it is due to be released next week. It's on the front of one of the RTE Guides between now and Christmas and part of the proceeds from the sale of this Video/DVD over Christmas will go to the 3T's and therefore will go directly to the help charities that are listed.

We certainly hope it will be a success, having seen some of the video I am absolutely convinced it's going to be a smash hit so that is a piece of good news, please tell your friends over Christmas to keep an eye out for it, you won't be able to miss it I can tell you – we've done a brisk publicity campaign about it.

But it's not all about the doom and gloom, as Johnny has said, it's all about the future, building a tomorrow where we can grapple with the problem of suicide in modern Ireland and suicidal behaviour in a more therapeutic way so that we have the ultimate aim of reducing the tragedy of suicide in Ireland so on that bright note can we just say one more thank you to Johnny McEvoy and we'll see you in the bar for a cup of tea – thank you.