

The 3T's – Turning the Tide of Suicide

Coping With and Surviving Depression

Evening Lecture Series 2004

Transcript

Don Baker Lecture

Held On

Thursday 20th May, 2004

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Coping With and Surviving Depression Evening Lecture Series 2004

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Introduction by Professor Kevin Malone:

Good Evening and welcome to the next in our 3T's Spring Evening Lecture Series 2004. For those of you who haven't met me before my name is Kevin Malone, my day job is Professor of Psychiatry and Mental Health Research at St. Vincents Hospital and University College Dublin. After hours in my spare time I'm involved as everyone with the 3T's is involved in a voluntary capacity, turning the tide of suicide in Ireland. It's a daunting task which we decided to tackle in a variety of ways head on and at the end of the day we sincerely hope we can make a huge impression on how suicidal depression is resourced and treated and supported in this country. I think we have waited long enough and I certainly don't want to wait another 10 years to see it change.

So we embarked on a variety of projects and our mission is to turn the tide of suicide in Ireland through dedicated research, intervention and support and we started by doing this by supporting existing organisations who were out at the coalface and they include Aware, Schizophrenia Ireland, The Samaritans, National Suicidal Bereavement Support Network, the Irish Association of Suicidology, National Suicide Research Foundation, these are all organisations that are out there working in one way or another in a voluntary capacity towards this goal of turning the tide of suicide. So what we have done is brought all those together and we are trying to raise awareness, obviously funding, and we intend to keep going and influence the traffic and power so to speak.

Now one of the things we decided to do was to put together a lecture series last Autumn but a lecture series with a difference. When you hear the word lecture you think, oh God, another bloody expert, but we decided to do it slightly different and turn to the real experts and they are those who have suffered and coped and survived with depression, who so very often are unsung heroes in their struggles. We decided it would be good idea to dedicate our "lecture series" to inviting people who through their lives have encountered depression, confronted depression, have

experienced dark, dark hours in the throes of those depressions but have survived through luck or serendipity or faith or hope or support or all of those things to tell their stories and to make a difference in their day jobs so to speak.

Some of you were lucky enough to hear Kay Jamison when she was here, then we had Johnny McEvoy, then we had Gareth O'Callaghan last month. We were really delighted when we approached tonight's guest who is internationally famous for his very individual style of singing and the music that he has brought to many people's hearts over the years. He's had his own struggle with depression and when we approached him to talk about it he was very modest and said he would be delighted to do it. I first met Don Baker yesterday when we went on Newstalk 106 together and we were really thrown into the furnace together and we hit it off from the start and I was really looking forward to hearing Don talk about his personal story tonight in our Coping with and Surviving Depression series.

I have a few housekeeping announcements that I will make at the end of the talk but you have heard enough from me and I would now like to turn you over to this evening's guest, would you please welcome Mr. Don Baker.

Don Baker: Good evening everybody. Well this guy goes for a job to an electrical shop and he is not very bright the poor lad but he has a good heart and the foreman actually likes him but he failed all the questions and he says look I'll give you one more chance, which is the odd one out he says – a TV, a toaster or a dog ? And your man thinks about and he says – a toaster. And he says how do you make that out ? And the young lad says well you need a licence for a TV, you need a licence for a dog but you don't need a licence for a toaster.

The reason I thought I'd start with a bit of a yarn was just to lighten things up because sometimes the atmosphere can get a little bit heavy. We are here tonight to discuss depression, the manifestations of depression and what causes depression and probably how to cope with depression. I'm not so sure you can ever fully heal it. I don't hold with the saying I hear about the place, "let that go, let this go", I've never let go of anything in my life. I have learned to live with it and it's very important.

My story quite simply began when I was six years of age and I was sick, I had TB and I went into hospital. I went through a very traumatic experience. Now I am 54, I was born in 1950 and in those days you're parents were only allowed visit you on Wednesdays for 1 hour and on Sundays so I fretted something terrible. I still remember it, I didn't sleep most nights and if I did I cried myself to sleep and I'm a 54 year old man, not old man, grown man, and I'm not in the least bit ashamed to say that I missed my mother, I still do actually being honest about it. The effects of it were, I didn't realise until I got into my adult life, the effects that that episode would have on my life. I remember this fretting feeling all the time and then I was befriended, if you like, by a Sister Boyle who was head nurse at the time in the hospital and she used to come down at night. She recognised that I was fretting and missing home and she used to come down at night and tuck me in and give me a little kiss and stuff. I was just a little kid, 6 years of age and I got a lot of comfort from that piece of love. But she came to me one evening and said she was getting married and she was leaving. I actually think that's when I began to wear the mask.

I was just talking to Professor Kevin there a few minutes ago about that and it's funny when you become famous and to the outside world, people say "there's Don Baker" he's in films and on stage every night, people have no idea really what's going on in the background. I remember listening to the Gay Byrne show one day and there was a girl on the radio, she drove a BMW, she had three houses, fantastic job and she wore all designer clothes. Now that means nothing and I know that, she was dying inside, absolutely dying inside.

You take on a false persona, you put it in the background, you just get on with life and it's not going to affect me. In reality what is happening is feelings that are buried are buried alive, they will come back to haunt you. I used to say to people, you cannot heal what you cannot feel but I've changed that since. Now I say to people, you cannot heal what you won't feel. Because what happens is when we switch off, when a child goes through a traumatic experience and we switch off, we have cut ourselves off, that is what happens so we have to go back. Great books written by Mr. John Bradshaw on the subject, a great book he has written called "Homecoming", I recommend it to anybody, "Reclaiming the inner child" so we have to go back and reclaim the inner child. And allow the child to suffer legitimately, because all neurosis is a substitute for legitimate suffering.

I had to close down, because I think the anxiety at that age would have killed me, I had no choice, it was a subconscious decision, I can't remember making it but I know that's what happened.

Later on in life I came from a home where my father was an alcoholic, upheaval all the time, lived in a total state of fear. As far back as I can remember there were fights at home, windows smashed in arguments and police being called and I grew up thinking that this was normal, I actually thought that this was normal, living with that fear, I actually thought it was normal. I wound up, I was what you would call the hero. In most dysfunctional families you have what you would call the lost child, you know the scapegoat, I don't know whether you are familiar with all this stuff I'm talking about, you see the problem with tonight ladies and gentlemen, if we were to take one subject like anger we could speak about it for 2-3 hours, so tonight we only have an hour and so many minutes to get through all this stuff. I am just going to skim the surface.

Let me just put you in the picture, I was lecturing I suppose there's no other way to put it, in the Rosminion College in Drumcondra and I used to lecture for an hour and a half two nights a week to around 50 students and I did two twelve week courses and even at the end of it we still had stuff we needed to discuss but the time was up. So to give all this stuff to you in one hour is literally impossible so I'm just going to talk about myself in a personal way that maybe you can relate to, without getting into the nitty gritty of the healing process although I will touch on that because I think it is very important.

So usually in a dysfunctional family what happens is the hero is the one who will take the drink, take the drugs, get into trouble with the police and that's exactly what I did. I wound up in a place called Daingan and while I was there I was the abuse was reinforced if you know what I mean. Now we spoke about rejection, what I suffered in hospital would have been abandonment and rejection and I told you the feelings that I buried are buried alive and they will come back to haunt you. You must deal with them eventually, you need a good therapist and a lot of courage.

Anyway, I wound up in a place called Daingan in Co. Offaly, under the care of the Oblate Brothers and I received abuse there. Every day this brother would come down and stand over me, I was 13 years of age at that stage, and he would ask me sexual questions. Did you go hard today, did you touch yourself, horrible stuff, and knowing, even having the sense at the age of 13, if I tell this guy once that I done something and of course I did, of course I masturbated, I was going through puberty for Christ's sake, who doesn't but I wasn't about to tell this guy that because if I had've said yes he would have said, show me what you did and I was fucked. And I knew that so all I could say was yes brother, no brother, yes brother, no brother.

They put me isolated working in a church so I was on my own and there was nobody else around. He could come down there anytime he wanted, it was a little small church and I'd be there all day long and even the solitude played on my nerves. I had my first panic attack at the age of 13, horrific major anxiety attack. I remember it well, I thought I tasted blood in my mouth and I spit on my hands looking for blood and I felt a rush going to my head and I just began to shake and I was like a volcano. We were saying the rosary, it was compulsory, we had to say the rosary every night and I jumped up and I asked the brother could I go to the toilet, and he saw me I looked like the colour of the hulk, I was green, and you did not get up from saying the rosary.

They then, I got into a scuffle with some boy in the yard and I didn't realise until I was maybe 34 years of age, exactly what had happened because apparently like with paedophiles they groom their victims and this guy was trying to groom me but I wasn't playing ball. So he took the next option which was to physically beat me. So three of them took me this particular night and we wore just a grey nightgown like a woman would wear and we used to put a belt around it. We were all healthy young boys and we certainly could've done with a pair of pyjamas I can tell you or even to sleep naked would have been better than wearing this thing. And they took it off and they proceeded to beat me, it took them about a half an hour and I know for a fact that they enjoyed every minute of it, three of them.

Again, you bury it, you know the funny thing was, when I left that place, I won't give you his name but the particular brother who administered the beating, walked me to the bus and for some reason I was walking up the steps of the bus and I turned

around and said to him "I'll pray for you", and I've always thought to myself what a strange thing to say to someone that's beat you up. Little did I know how true it was because these days when I try to practice forgiveness that's exactly what I do, I pray for people like that, not for them because forgiveness is for me not for them.

The spiritual awakening, I think, I wouldn't even say the majority, I'd say all spiritual awakenings are of the educational variety and I say to people who have had nervous breakdowns, I think you've had a nervous break through. Because sometimes it gets so bad, I used to hear sayings like "you lose the battle but you win the war". I'd think, what the hell do they mean, what in christ's name are they on about and this stuff, let go, all these different sayings, I'd say, I just don't get this, I don't get this.

This was when I begin to recover at the age of 33, but when I got to 15 I found the magic potion because what happens, if you are rejected or abandoned as a child, forget about Daingan but just as a child in hospital, you feel you're not good enough, you feel you don't belong, you feel unworthy, you feel you don't deserve, you feel there is something wrong with you and there is - you've begun to suffer from depression, there is something wrong with you and that's what it is.

So, I'm released from Daingan at the age of 15, a couple of guys ask me am I going for a beer, and I find this magic potion. Suddenly I feel normal after 3 or 4 pints. Most guys who profess to being alcoholic are not alcoholic at all, they're medicating their depression. It's a dangerous thing to do, I wouldn't advise anybody to do it, so what happened to me when I got to 33 the alcohol was the straw that broke the camels back. However, when I gave it up I didn't sleep for two years, the panic attacks were worse than ever. And so began the long process of recovery, and it was long. And all I can say is, I don't know why but I was relentless. I left no stone unturned. Constant therapy, constant meetings, constant working the 12 step programme, constant meditation, constant journaling, every night. I actually became enthusiastic about it, maybe I can be normal, maybe there is a light at the end of the tunnel and I just kept chipping away, chipping away.

I started to read the right literature, now just let me say I think there is a misconception here about reading the proper literature. I'm reminded of a friend of mine who's long since dead, who knew everything about the guitar. He said you put

your finger here, here, here, you do this, that's A flat and ninth, and that's a flat in fifth, put your hand this way and that's e-major seven, you know he knew everything, he was a jazz enthusiast. But ask him to play a tune and he wasn't able to play anything. So that's the problem. We can know it all in the head but when it comes to putting it into practice in our daily lives, that's a different story altogether.

There are many ways we can avoid healing, there are many ways we can avoid it, you see can't heal what you won't feel, we have to feel again. But believe me it's not as bad as when we were children, it isn't as bad. I always think, I lived in Whitehall and there's a little street when you come out of Lark Hill just on Collins Avenue, going from Lark Hill up to the lights, it's only about 6 or 7 houses and when I was a small boy I thought that was like 5 miles long. Now I drive by in about 2 seconds and if I was to walk I'd probably do it in 20 seconds. So with the emotion, when we're little children the anxiety seems huge, so when we're adults we think if we are going to feel again, now we're like the iceberg, the part we see is the piece that sticks out of the water, but the bulk of the iceberg is under the water in what we call the subconscious. We don't even know we are reacting to the stuff, we think we can get on with our lives, we listen to things like, you know, you need a good kick up the arse, stop feeling sorry for yourself, just get on with it.

It doesn't work, it doesn't wash, believe me, I've tried all that. Every time I see a guy going down the road going like that, I say there goes a hurt individual, there goes a very hurt man, because that was me, the bravado and then I'd become arrogant, I was either totally not good enough or I was better than anybody else. I like buddism a little bit because they teach about the right amount of tension in life. So you can't heal what you won't feel so the problem is going back in there.

Now, in my experience there are two types of fear, there is the fear of fear. If we want to heal we have to go into a state of fear, that's the bad news, I'm sorry but that's the reality of it. We have to quit the acting out, we have to go on a spiritual path, that's what I feel, I'm not a religious man, we need a good therapist, we need all the help we can get from the right people. We either work it out or act it out. It's funny you know because it starts with a thought, the thought hits you, it happens in seconds, thought, feeling, bump, bump, bump, bump. Imagine a circle at the bottom is the thought, then you get the feeling, it goes straight into your

head, you can judge, you condemn, you analyse, you blame, blame is a terrible trap, it just keeps you angry, never ever blame, point the finger this way not that way and that includes the brothers in Daingan. There's a difference between placing responsibility where it lies and blaming, like the difference between worry and concern. If you are concerned, you won't have anxiety, if you're worried you will. So we need to learn to listen to our feelings.

There is no such thing as an unhealthy emotion, anger is one of the healthiest emotions I know, while it's white, if we are expressing ourselves constantly. You see this is what's causing depression aswell, if we're not expressing ourselves on a constant basis while the anger is white. Lets just take a for instance, I go every Wednesday and I meet Jack, we go to Bewleys for a cup of coffee and lets pretend we could smoke, lets just fantasise for a minute, and every Wednesday I meet Jack, Jack has no cigarettes, he keeps taking my cigarettes, you know, he's earning more money than I am and yet he won't buy a packet of cigarettes he keeps taking mine, he doesn't even ask can he take one, he just lifts the pack takes one out and smokes it. So I feel I'm being taken for granted, he's making an idiot out of me and all that. You see I'm suffering from low self-esteem, I don't know how to say no, because it's imperative that people like me, my self-worth is totally dependent on what you think of me. What I think of me seems to be irrelevant, because I can't love myself, I don't even like myself, so Jack can do as he goddamn well pleases and I will people please and say nothing. So I don't say it.

So the anger, week goes in week goes out and then Don explodes - you bastard, why don't you buy your own cigarettes and throws the table up and throws coffee over him and Jack thinks, what a headcase, what a looper. Well that's the way I was, until I learned your anger will help you to set a boundary. Now today, if somebody did that I'd say you know what you're a gas man, you really are and I'd start to laugh. Yeah man what do you mean - you won't buy a cigarette, what's your problem, you know what I mean. Ah I didn't realise, well you'd want to get a grip because you're not taking any more of my cigarettes. Now that's expressing anger when it's white, standing up for yourself, setting a boundary, but if we suffer from, John Bradshaw calls it 'toxic shame' if we are shamed as children and we are suffering from this toxic shame, we won't be able to stand up for ourselves, we won't be able to set that boundary and it's amazing when you get that together people will

not violate you, they will not cross that line because they know they won't get away with it.

Now this stuff is easier said than done. I remember one time I went into Flanagans Restaurant in O'Connell Street and I'd been in therapy for about 4 or 5 years at the time, the nightmares had just about stopped, I was eating well, and sleeping well, and I went in there on my own, I was very well dressed as far as I can remember, I sat on my own and ordered a steak but they delivered this rasher on a plate and a little bit of lettuce thrown beside it. So I plucked up the courage and for the first time in my life I decided to stand up for myself. I asked to see the manager and the manager came down and I said I'm sorry to complain, I don't normally do this but it's £14.00 for a steak and they've given me this thing here on the plate and I'm sorry but it's just not acceptable. Now I was shaking under the table and he said, I'm so sorry sir, removes the plate and comes back with a cow on the plate, you know, free Ballygowan, free vegetables, and I'm like in a state of anxiety on the verge of a panic attack, couldn't eat a thing, then I was saying if I don't eat it they're going to be insulted. I was caught and I was saying, will I stay, will I go, why did I stand up for myself, this is too difficult, I can't do this, it's too tough.

So I went up and he started brushing my coat behind me with a brush and I said Jesus get away from me for Christs sake. Would you like a peppermint sir, and I thought let me out of here, and then they were putting on my overcoat, are you all right sir and thank you and opening the door and all that. And I'm outside panicking, heavy breathing, but you see while we're changing we're like the pendulum, we go from one side to the other. Guess what happened, every restaurant I went into I was, excuse me, there's something brown there, can you take that plate back - sir that's a bit of pepper. So you see we just swing we just swing until we get the middle ground and I was at this for ages. One of my friends said Don you know, you don't have to do it in every restaurant, you've got it now, a little bit of tact, a bit of diplomacy, everything is cool now, you know.

The people pleasing, I was like the nodding dog in back of the car, the head kept going up and down like that, it never went from side to side, it was always up and down. I used to get so bloody angry over this stuff, this was like being dependent on other people. Don that's a lovely jacket you're wearing, I'm going for an

interview tomorrow any chance you could give it to me. Sure boss, off with the jacket, here you go, knowing you'd never see it again. And I'd walk home in the snow, freezing, but what a nice guy I am, what a nice guy. And I thought, he's going to like me, what a great character this Don Baker guy is, what a decent man and I'm laid up in bed the next week with the flu.

Or some guy says to me, Don I've an interview in Cork and I'm really stuck any chance of driving me to Cork, yeah no problem, no problem jump in the car. Drop him off in Cork and on the way back I'm going, you fuckin' idiot, you know I'm knackered, driving for six hours, are you crazy, you don't even know this guy, you met him in a bar. You know this is what I mean by, it's so imperative that they like you.

When I was in therapy for a while, I began to get it together so I'm rehearsing down on Ormond Quay and this guy comes in and he goes, how's it going Don. Listen I'm running a charity gig, a benefit gig for - I don't know what it was for it got so ridiculous people used to come up to me and say their granny died and would I do a benefit gig for them. That's how bad it got, because of me, not their fault, it was because of me not being able to say no. So I said, yeah I'll do it for you. He said it will be on the 24th of next month. I'll organise the PR but I'll need posters. Yeah, I'll send the posters no problem, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think the only word I knew how to say was yeah. I remember leaving the room, I was on a break from rehearsals, I got to the door, put my hand on the knob and a little voice said, you're doing it again, you're doing it again.

So I stopped, I walked back, and I leaned over and said to the guy, I changed my mind, I'm not going to do that gig at all and I walked out with my knees shaking. I got to the door opened the door and I had to walk up these steps but I was like Rocky going up the steps, I got it, I did it - I said no.

Spirituality is all about action. A fella said to me I got up this morning, made my bed and said my prayers. Which was the spiritual act? I said saying your prayers, he said no, making the bed, that took effort - do you get it? It's not easy but the rewards are great.

We need, well I needed to, I'm sorry if I'm generalising here I shouldn't do that or be judgemental. I certainly wouldn't be here today if people had been judgemental of me, Lord knows that, we really need to stop pointing the finger that way and start pointing the finger this way. We never get any answers pointing the finger that way. It's like going to the doctor and getting a prescription, you've a broken leg and you're getting a prescription for your next door neighbour, that's what it's like. So we start to take responsibility for ourselves.

I was talking earlier, now I'm jumping from one thing to another because I'm trying to get through as much as I can in the short time we have here and I hope it's going to be of some benefit to you – but it's not going to phase me either. It's one of the things I've learnt in life, what I think of you is my responsibility, it really is 100% my responsibility. What you think of me is nothing to do with me, not that, not an iota and see if I try to make it my business what you think of me, I'm in trouble. Now I'm not saying I'd deliberately go out to try and hurt somebody or do anything wrong, I don't, thank God, but if I make it my business what you think of me then I'm in trouble, that one has to go, that one has to go. My friend Mick Hanly wrote a song "Happy Like This", it's called, where he says like warts and all.

Another strange thing to happen to me on the healing path, was, you know, suffering from the anxiety and panic attacks, I'd always run to the GP and get some valium from him if I got that bad. One day I was in Fairview Park with my son whose 30 years of age, Glen, and my youngest daughter, she's 21 now and I had a bad panic attack and I was just about able to drive home. Of course I'd locked myself in my room and wouldn't come out, stuff like that. I came downstairs after an hour or two and said Glen will you help me go around to the doctor and he kind of linked me around – the doctor was around in Blessington Street, Dr. O'Connor, lovely gentleman. I got around, crossed the road put my hand on the door and this was a fluke by the way, I didn't know what had happened this day, I just took my hand off the door and said, I ain't going to medicate no more, I ain't medicating nothing and ladies and gentlemen like a miracle, before I crossed the road every symptom was gone. What happened there, wow.

It took me two and a half to three years for the penny to drop. It's called acceptance ladies and gentlemen. Anthony de Mello, the greatest spiritual teacher I've ever come across, he says what you look at disappears. Hug your demons or they'll bite you in the ass. What you resist, persists. I had accepted the condition and it was a fluke, it really was, Anthony de Mello says, as a psychiatrist and a spiritual teacher, should I leave the patient in pain until they are sick of it or should I take them out of it and he was always divided there between those two and my experience that particular day, I think, I just got sick of it, really and truly.

Then it got to the stage where I said look I'm going to take my own power back. I used to carry a small mirror with me in my inside pocket, like a ladies mirror, what they use for putting their lipstick on, and you couldn't see it inside my hand, no one would know. Anytime I felt a panic attack coming on, I'd look into my own eyes and say Don it's not a heart attack, it's not a brain tumour, you know, it's fear man, it's just fear coming up. You see, because they looked into my eyes when I was a kid and said you're this, you're that, you're the other and put all this fear into me looking into my eyes. So I'm going to look into my own eyes and take my own power back, tell myself I'm okay, I'm going to validate myself, I'm going to love and approve of myself, I'm not dependent on anybody to do that for me, nobody. And where this stuff comes up most, if you don't heal it, is in your relationships, especially with a member of the opposite sex. This stuff goes into co-dependancy, now co-dependency, I mean there's been books written on the subject, we can't get into it here tonight, I mean we'd need to be here every Thursday for the next 6 months talking about that stuff and trying to come to grips with it.

I'm going to sing a song for you, just to break it up a little bit because I see a woman yawning down the back there, by the way yawning is very good. I remember a therapist telling me one time that yawning is letting go of tension, never hold it back, always yawn, it lets go of stuff.

I was talking about my time as a child, you know it's great stuff to write songs, that's the good part. This is called, why is it every time I sing people up the front begin to talk, I don't get that. I was at a gig last Sunday night in Gortahurk and there was a woman up the front, the whole place was silent but this woman right up the front roaring her head off her and her friend but you know you got to have respect for

yourself so I just stopped and I said I ain't playing until this woman is removed and that's exactly what happened.

Anyway, this is called Childhood Blues.....

Thank you very much, you're very kind. I remember I done a gig, I'm a bit deaf really, I can't hear you so you're wasting your time, I really can't hear you you're wasting your time and I don't want to hear you either. I remember, I done a gig in West Germany, I travelled for about 9 hours on a train, when I got there there was one person at the gig, one lad, and he clapped after every song and at the end of the concert he gave me a standing ovation. So these days if I do a gig and there's more than one person I'm very happy.

Anyway to get back to what we are talking about ladies and gentlemen, I hope tonight has been of some benefit to you and you are getting something out of it. I'd just like to say, the healing process, is like, I'm sure if Professor Malone was up here now he'd tell you, psychiatrists and counsellors talk about the oh yeah factor – I mean I had counsellors telling me stuff for years and they'd be explaining stuff and I'd say, ah yeah, I know that, yeah, yeah, hmm, yeah and then one day I'd go – ah yeah. So they call it the ah yeah factor. It's when the penny drops and I'm sure it must be a really tough job for people like that because I've been telling this guy the same thing for four years, every week, week in, week out I've been telling him the same thing and now he goes ah yeah now I get it. But at least in the end we do get it, hopefully, well some of us do anyway, many are called few are chosen, we're all called but few choose to hear the call.

So we talked about people pleasing, we touched a little bit on anger, self-pity, okay, I think you need to allow, you see, I'll give you a real positive affirmation to say to yourself in the mirror "I am powerful enough to feel vulnerable". Because when I told you earlier about the fear of fear, we're afraid of going in to the fear because we're afraid of feeling vulnerable and I'll tell you another thing, we're afraid that all the stuff we think about ourselves, I'm not good enough, I don't deserve, I'm not loveable, all that stuff, all the toxic shame stuff, we're actually afraid it might be true, so we don't want to look at it because we're afraid it might be true. Now I told you about the iceberg, this is going on in the subconscious and I was amazed to discover

I could keep secrets from myself. Now it's easy to know I can keep a secret from you and you and you, I can understand that but to think you can keep secrets from yourself, that just blew me away – how was I doing that, how could that happen ?

So again it's the iceberg syndrome, the subconscious, what's in there and we need to bring that stuff to the surface. Most of us are asleep, in fact most of us are having a bloody nightmare, that's why I love Anthony de Mello's book 'Awareness' because he says what you are aware of you are in control of, what you are not aware of is in control of you so I feel everything must start with awareness. We need to become aware of ourselves. When we are in that state we tend to react rather than act, and then overreact, I know I do, it's very difficult to get the middle ground, it takes a lot of years. I went to see John Bradshaw, he gave a lecture there in the RDS and he said usually and I know this might sound terrible to somebody who is in recovery for 2 to 3 years, I don't mean to put you off don't get me wrong, stay on your path, keep going, don't give up. But he said usually, the core issues don't surface until you're in or around 13 years away from your major addiction, you know. Well you can either say, that's good or it's not good, it's positive or negative, I don't know but that has been my experience, I didn't really shed the real tears until I was you know 13 years away from my drug of choice, to bury all that stuff that's when it started to hit the surface.

I'll tell you an amazing experience I had, I used to say to people I wish I could get a breath, you know that panic attack feeling like that you can't breathe, I used to run to doctors, you know, there's something wrong with me, and they'd said Don you're a hypochondriac. I'd say no, no, I have a tightness around my chest and here there's something wrong with my lungs and chest. And he'd said I'll send you for another X-ray – this would be every three months. Some of the lads in the band would say, Don, you're going to get sick from the radiation, you know. The doctor saw me in the surgery once and he said Don, get the fuck out, sorry about the bad language, but that's what he said, get the fuck out Don, I've had enough of you. It was all emotional stuff, because emotion is energy in motion, it was all emotional stuff, so you know, this feeling that I couldn't breathe. I started, I mean I was doing everything, I was meditating, praying, journaling, I was on a 12 step programme, I had a therapist I went to religiously every week, every course that came up I would be on it, I went to the Hanley Centre. I went to place called An Tir na beag, which

means Little Sanctuary in Tipperary and that was kind of funny because, I didn't realise because they were in plain clothes, I was with three nuns there were 12 of us on the course, and of course, mise at the breakfast table, telling filthy jokes, and the three nuns were at the table and everyone was trying to kick me under the table to tell me, and of course I didn't know, and they'd say did you not realise that they're nuns. So I called them over and said Sister I'm really sorry. And they said no we're delighted, we're privileged, we love being treated normal, it's brilliant, we've been longing for this for years, get away from that bloody monastery. Then of course I got worse, well did you hear about this one.... . And they'd say Oh my God, so the crack was 90.

But getting back to this thing about not being able to breathe, people would say, Don of course you can breathe, I mean if you couldn't breathe you'd be dead. I couldn't explain what I meant. Now what I was looking for and you see the worst thing we can do when we're trying to heal is try and figure it all out, go up into the head and talk incessantly, non-stop, keep us out of the feelings. It doesn't have to be a drug or a drink or television or over-eating or over-smoking, we can go straight up to the head and try and figure it all out, but some part of me kicked in and said you need to get into the heart, you're powerful enough to feel vulnerable. This thing about the breath I couldn't really get that but one morning I woke up and breathed deeply, just like that, it was like somebody gave me a million dollars and I thought I don't believe I just did that. What I needed was, you know when a kid has a cry and at the end he's sniffing and sobbing and sighing, do you know, do you remember when we used to fall and cut our knees and we'd cry.

See I knew that's what I needed but all the books in the world couldn't give me that, I needed to get that and then I got it. Now it didn't happen again I'd say about 9 days later, now in the meantime I doing a thing called breath integration, commonly known as rebirthing, and I contribute this healing a lot to that, I wouldn't even call it a technique or a method, but you know we come into life on the breath and we go out on the breath and every breath we take in between is important but I'm not here to promote that kind of thing, not that there's anything wrong with it, just giving you my personal experience. About 9 days later I woke up and propped myself up on the pillow and went, sniff, sniff, sigh, I couldn't believe it, again, I got two of them. A couple of days later I went into spontaneous healing, all day long, sniffing and

sighing, it was like weights going off me, the freedom, the healing feeling, the liberation, the freedom, my body felt like a feather, I was sleeping like a baby, no more panic attacks, no more, it was like a miracle.

I know another guy who got it, a very famous guy I was on tour with, and what did he do, ran to a doctor and the doctor gave him an inhaler, after all the work he did on himself, and he's pushing all the feelings back down with the inhaler. I said Jimmy are you crazy, get rid of that, you're just healing. No, no, I have bronchitis. I said, no you haven't, the same thing is going on with me, you're just healing. I think it lasted for about 2 months and I'm grateful for every breath of it and every day of it.

It took 15 years to get it, 15 years of journaling, of meditating, of this course, of that course, a course in miracles, conversations with God, 'Return to Love', Marian Williamson, 'The Path to Love', Deepak Chopra, 'Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway', Susan Jeffers, you name it, I read it. It took 15 years but I got it and I hope you get it too. Take care of yourselves.

Professor Malone: I think we will have time for a couple of questions if Don is willing to take a couple so maybe we'll do that and then I'll wrap up and express my gratitude on behalf of the audience. Don do you mind taking a couple of questions ?

Question: I'd like to ask you Don do you find therapeutic value in music ?

Don Baker: I'd love to say yes but the answer is no. That song I just sang, Childhood Blues, is like returning to the scene of an accident. There is some value in it but it's like picking at a scab, I'd prefer not to do it. That's the answer to your question, I'd love to say, yes it's therapeutic but it has always been painful for me, that's the way it is but having said that I think it makes for, I'm not a commercial artist like Boyzone or Cliff Richard, I'm a real person, I'm a real musician, I study music every day, I read music, I love classical music, I write songs that I hope are meaningful, that people like me and you can relate to. I'm not into songs like "I can't live if living is without you, I can't give or I can't breathe anymore", ladies and gentlemen, there are only three things you can't live without and that's food, water and fresh air - get a life.

Question: I've met Mr. Don Baker before, my name is Connor, I'm a chronic alcoholic, I try to take every day at a time, I go to Brother Lukes for my lunch, I sleep on the streets, I sleep in Pearse Street Garda Station and the Iveagh Hostel. I'm going through a really tough time. My question is this, what is the answer Don, do you take it one day at a time, is that possible ?

Don Baker: Yes, I would totally agree with that, you can't rush this thing or liken it to a boil on the back of your neck, you can't force it to come to a head, you've got to wait and yeah you've got to take one day at a time, there is no other way. I think being on a 12 step programme is a tremendous help. There's one thing I will say I found being on a 12 step programme, when I got to the 6th and 7th step, the 6th step says we are ready to have God remove all these defects of character, and the 7th step says we are humbly ready to have these defects of character removed. A terrible confusing time for me now, confusion is a high spiritual state to be in because no matter what decision you make when you're confused, you're going to realise, I made the wrong decision or I made the right decision, not a nice place to be but a high spiritual state to be in.

A long time, maybe 2 years on that one step, for instance, I had to find out why it wasn't working and the reason why was, we live in the relative world. Now I know it's going to sound like I'm intellectualising, and I don't like to intellectualise, I don't think it does me any good, and it certainly won't do anybody else any good. As Woody Guthrie said, any gobshite can get complicated, it takes genius to retain simplicity. And that's what I like to do, when somebody's explaining something to me I say tell me like I'm a six year old, leave out all the big words and just tell me like I'm a six year old and don't intellectualise. So I hope I'm not going to sound like that when I give you the answer.

I found that we live in the relative world in other words we have to know left and right in order to have a choice, we have to know up and down in order to have a choice, we have to know fat and skinny in order to have a choice. I believe in God, I don't know whether it's a he or a she or an it or an energy, but I do believe in a higher power and I believe we've been given free will and free choice and living in the relative world I believe we have to understand we are spiritual beings having a

physical experience. Now that doesn't mean that doesn't hurt but in relation to those two steps I'm asking God to remove my fear and my anxiety and my panic attacks. It's an impossibility - God cannot interfere with a gift he has already given you which is choice and free will. He will help you, he will show you where to dig, but you have to take up the spade and do the digging. He'll show you where to dig but he won't interfere with the workings of your mind, not with the precious gifts he's given you, the gift of choice and free will. Guess who created fear by the way - God. Why? So that we'd know love. Guess who created evil - God. Why? So that we'd know good. We live in a relative world. We have to experience both things in order to know. Knowing and experiencing are two different things so where I broke the back on that step was I flung my 12 and 12 across the room and a picture I had of Jesus Christ and cursed and cursed and said this ain't working, this just isn't working and I heard a little voice say to me, Don, ask God to help you to deal with it, not to take it away, just to help you to deal with it and that's what made all the difference, by asking God to help me to deal with the problem, not to take it away.

It's like teaching a child to walk, if I keep lifting the child up she'll never learn on her own. My relationship with my higher power is like the one I have with my children, I don't want my children hanging around me all day, go out into the world and enjoy yourself, if you need me I'm here. I don't need your adoration and I don't need you to pray to me. I know for a fact the God I believe in, the day he's going to rejoice, is the day I say man I don't need you. That's when he's going to say hallelujah son you have it.

Question: I have a brother and he's taking panic attacks at the moment and he's after been out of work for 2 or 3 years over taking the panic attacks, basically my mother had a shop when we were living in Coolock and she has a container shop and when we were working as kids in the shop, we were taking 2 or 3 euro a day from the till from my mother and I think that's playing on his mind. Do you reckon that could bring on panic attacks? Feeling guilty over something he done years ago, you know?

Don Baker: Well, let me just put you wide to something. Guilt is I made a mistake, shame is I am a mistake, now not shame in the every sense of the word. Guilt is I made a mistake but toxic shame is I am a mistake, there is a huge difference.

You've just given me a little synopsis there of what you think may be the problem with your brother. I don't think that's what's going on at all, I don't think so. What age is he ?

33 – and when were you stealing the Euros, the Euro is only out a couple of years, was it pounds ? Yeah it was pounds so what were you little kids ? 15 or 16 at the time. What was the family life like ? What was the relationship between your mother and father, had you're dad any problems ? Everything was grand, good provider, no alcohol problems, no drug problems, was he a workaholic or anything like that ? No he was always there, your Mam was always there, so there was no heavy neurosis in the family or anything like that. It's hard to answer I don't know but if you like I'll give you my phone number and I'll talk to him, I can tell him how to heal the panics.

First thing he's got to understand if you're talking to him is to tell him that it's fear, what a panic attack is, it's fear, it's like a volcano, it's fear coming to the surface, you know. That's why I told you about the mirror, look into your own eyes. Now something happened him, it's also a repression which causes a depression. Something you may not know about, something he's hiding from you and all the rest of the family, maybe he could've been bullied in school, but my guess is that something happened him.

The other side of the coin is that it could be an accumulation of things, maybe it's not just one thing, you know, it could be an accumulation of a lot of rejection as Kevin spoke to me earlier about, abandonment, rejection, if she abandoned him or rejected him, that can really affect your self-esteem and your confidence, that could result in having panic attacks. Sometimes, as you are saying, people can have anxiety attacks and not know the reasons why they are having them but God works in strange ways and I know it's difficult enough to cope with panic attacks. It's like the postman, he'll knock at your door and if you don't answer he'll kick at the door and if you don't answer he'll kick the door down. If you stay in bed and refuse to get up, he'll burn the house down.

I know for a fact that these panic attacks sometimes can be a calling, can be a wake up call for people, for them to take a look at themselves, it's like the straw that breaks the camels back, and most people I know who have suffered in this way have

gone on a spiritual path. This thing about, having your name in the papers, having records, being in films, that's not success, that's bullshit, we're talking about the inner workings of the human being. Real success is on the inside, real success is when I don't care if my photograph is taken. I was actually put out, if I'm going to be honest, about having my photograph taken, I've had that shit all my life. Now I know it's necessary, I'm trying to help the Professor and I'm trying to give him as much help as I can and I suffered through it but I don't really need it, I don't like my name in the papers. I don't like that big poster there, I'm playing here on Saturday night with my band and if I could play here without that poster being up or without my name being in the paper I'd be as happy as Larry or without having to go on TV, to me it's just a pain in the ass but it's part of the job and to get bums on seats, you know I'm trying to raise a family and I have to do it.

But you see whereas before when I had the low self-esteem I was looking outside myself for approval so it was imperative I get a big crowd coming to the concerts, my self-esteem depended on it but then when I got it together I couldn't care less. The spiritual path is not about getting anything, it's about dropping things, not just dropping the idea you know if I get the right Mercedes I'm going to be happy, if I get the right Hotel I'm going to be happy, if I get the right relationship I'll be happy, get the right nose job, get the right boob job I'll be happy, live in the right locality I'll be happy, no, no, no, these are all cul de sacs. The law is you go within or without, just go inside yourself and therein your weakness becomes your strength, when we deal with the panic attacks and depression and I can't tell you, you have to experience it yourself, you really have to, your weakness becomes your strength. I used to hate people telling me that, I used to say what are they on about. It must be experienced, when you experience it then you will know.

Professor Malone: I think we have one more question there on the left if you don't mind. Actually it reminds me when you mentioned there about being a mistake, my father in law was a wise man and my wife when she was a child wasn't too fond of her younger sister and in a very unkind moment said Vanessa you're a mistake, you're just a mistake, she was five years younger, and she went running to her father and said Margaret called me a mistake. And her dad looked at her and said Vanessa, we are all mistakes, which settled the argument. One more question.

Question: I just want to know, you said alcohol was your crutch. I'm going through depression and anxiety at the moment and food is my crutch and I just want to know how do you know when to let go of the crutch ?

Don Baker: Okay, you're going through depression and you're using alcohol to get relief, alcohol and food, well the first thing I recommend is you go to your GP and just tell him what you told me. I don't think you should start swallowing tablets either but I do think at the moment, fair play to you for saying that tonight in front of all these people because it takes an awful lot of courage to reach you're hand out for help. I don't have degrees in this stuff, I'm just an ordinary joe soap that happens to be famous, that happens to be in a position that maybe just maybe by saying the right thing here or there, talking about my own experience I could help somebody. Are you sleeping at all ? On and off, you find it difficult to sleep, can you concentrate, can you read, well read something interesting.

I'll tell you what if I may be so bold Kevin, this is a Professor here, Professor Kevin Malone, would it be okay if you had a quick word with her after. We'll both have a quick word with you afterwards, because I need time to mull that over in my head just to see what could be done to help you and I certainly will give you all the help I can.

Thank you very much Ladies and Gentlemen, God Bless you all.

Professor Malone: Thank you very much Mr. Don Baker. Ladies and gentlemen that was fantastic, there is no substitute for hearing it from the person themselves and I think Don was particularly sensitive in dealing with peoples questions which demonstrates his connection with people.

There are a couple of final announcements I want to give, the next 3T's lecture is on the 10th June when Mannix Flynn is going to be with us. I want to briefly mention the Ladies Mini Marathon we mentioned it the last time and since that time we have had 60 people sign up which is fantastic to run on behalf of the 3Ts and I think we might have some flyers on the way out for who wants to do it.

You'll be pleased to hear we are working on the autumn series as we speak and I hope that it will live up to the lecture series that we have so far.

Finally for today I want to mention that we are putting together a conference between the 12 – 14 November which is going to be called Suicide – The Irish Dimension and I'm delighted to say that we have a couple of world renowned guest speakers. We are going to have some Irish Research, some Irish Advocacy Groups, people from Aware, people from the National Suicide Bereavement Support Network, people from the National Suicide Research Foundation, so it's going to be a very good couple of days and I'll be able to bring you more information on that in due course.

The Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre have been a fantastic sponsor of this lecture series, they're really sticking their necks out when they didn't really have to and they just make us feel so welcome and they really are flying the flag of this project with great pride and honour and we're delighted they're doing that and they are now inviting you for a cup of tea and have a safe journey home and we look forward to seeing you in June.

Thank you very much.