

The 3T's – Turning the Tide of Suicide

Coping With and Surviving Depression

Evening Lecture Series 2004

Transcript

Gareth O'Callaghan Lecture

Held On

Thursday 22nd April, 2004

At

Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre

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Coping With and Surviving Depression Evening Lecture Series 2004

**Gareth O'Callaghan Lecture
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Introduction by Professor Kevin Malone:

Good Evening everybody. I saw some familiar faces on the way in and you're most welcome those of you who have been here before but for those who haven't been here before let me introduce myself, my name is Kevin Malone, I am a Professor of Psychiatry at the Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health Research at St. Vincent's and University College Dublin but in my spare time I'm a scientific and research director with the Turning the Tide of Suicide project, the 3Ts project, which has a very simple mission and that is to help, to address the problem of suicide in modern Ireland by turning the tide of suicide through research, education, intervention and support, a tall order perhaps but we've got to start somewhere and when we started at the beginning of last year, we had put together some awareness raising projects and some fundraising projects and one of the things we thought it was important to do was to put together a lecture series. Well lecture is not the right word really because there are any number of lectures but there are very few forums where you hear someone tell their story and you can listen to experts until you're blue in the face but there is nothing the same as hearing a story of a survivor. So we thought we'd put together a seasonal lecture series and last autumn we started with Kay Jamison, Johnny McEvoy, and Gareth O'Callaghan was listed but was unable to make it so I stepped in and gave the Psychiatrist's angle, but we really wanted to have Gareth here and those of you who were on that journey with either Kay Jamison or Johnny McEvoy will remember it as a very special night.

Now very briefly just let me tell you before I introduce Gareth this evening, I just wanted to give you a little update about what's been happening with the 3T's. Earlier this year we launched our 2004 3T's campaign and we were delighted that Pdraig Harrington was here again, for two reasons. First of all it was a pleasure to meet him again and secondly, he handed out the cheques. We had raised €100,000 last year through our efforts and this money went directly to the charities that were involved at the coal face. It also went to research groups and advocacy groups that

are working in the field of suicide and that's really what the 3Ts are about, we are about supporting and helping others who are in the field of research, support and education. So that was a great start to the year.

Also I want to say here, for those who were not aware of it, that the Jimmy Magee video that was put together before Christmas, his great sporting memories video, part of the proceeds of that video went to the 3Ts and we had a wonderful launch here before Christmas with some of the legends who featured in that sports video were here, including Ronnie Delaney, Paddy Cullen for infamous reasons, Mick O'Connell and a variety of other sports legends were here to support us that night – it was very important as well, Sean Kelly, the great cyclist, so we want to salute what they have done, they are reaching out and doing their bit. You may have seen forms for the mini marathon, anyone who is running in the mini marathon and who hasn't thought of their charity of choice yet, please don't forget the 3Ts because we might be the charity of your choice and we would certainly appreciate anything you can do for us on that front.

We have also updated our website www.3Ts.ie, it now is a fine website with educational and resource and help links to a variety of organisations including government agencies where you can access documents and all kinds of things with regard to mental health and I think it's going to help - it's a very valuable resource and Lise in our 3T's office has done a fantastic job on that regard.

Finally, just before we move to Gareth, we are putting together our first annual conference which is going to be supported here at the Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre and of course we must express our gratitude to them for their ongoing proud sponsorship of our mission and we will have more about that conference in due course.

So now it gives me personal pleasure to introduce Gareth O'Callaghan who very generously offered to be here for our last series, wasn't able to make it, but instead he agreed to be here tonight. For those of you who don't know Gareth, he's an RTE broadcaster and very popular on the airwaves. He has also written a book which is a very compelling and touching book of his own experience with depression which he

will tell you about himself called 'A Day Called Hope'. So could you now give a very warm welcome for Gareth O'Callaghan.

Gareth O'Callaghan: Hello and good evening. I always take a few seconds just to look around the room whenever I'm invited to give a talk because it means so much to me to be here, I'm so grateful to be here and it's very gratifying to know that so many of you felt it was important enough to come out to listen to my experience and my story and maybe just to find a little bit of strength out of the struggle that I endured and the years that I was lost in the wilderness and just felt that there was no way forward. I'm also grateful to know that my experience is validated because for many years of my life I never thought that my experience was worth anything, I never thought anybody would be interested in what I had to say, in what I endured and what I went through and in the loss that I felt for maybe five or six years of my life when there was literally just nothing there. I managed to exist but existence was literally all I could label it as, there was no value to it, there was nothing that I could label that was useful and there was no quality.

That was about 4 or 5 years ago when it was at it's worst and now I look around the city today, it was a beautiful day, and I love my life and I try to equate the way I feel today to the way I felt maybe 5 years ago and it's extraordinary what I've come through. So it's a great pleasure for me to be here with you this evening because I feel that I have so much in common with so many people here tonight and I think every single one of us is here for a very different reason, a very unique reason, I'm sure many of you are not quite sure why you are here tonight, maybe you're just hoping that something will click that will give you an insight into perhaps the way you're feeling or someone in your life is feeling or someone in your life can't feel, that you really wish they would feel like. Coming into the Hotel this evening I sometimes wonder why am I here tonight because there's a different reason everyday of my life why I'd like to share my experience and I remember a doctor telling me don't talk about the depression you suffered too much because you'll get depressed again. The question I had to put to that doctor was what would you know about depression.

It all started I suppose at an age when I can't fully recall, I was a young kid, I was shy, I was always the quiet one, I never liked talking and those of you who hear me

on the radio will probably find that hard to believe, but I always found that it was easier to listen and I listened intently to everything everyone around me said, to the music that was on the radio, to the records I eventually started buying, to the lyrics in the songs in the records and to the feelings they created inside me. I was always extremely shy, I lacked confidence, I was tall, I was the tallest guy in my class but yet I was the one who got picked on by the teachers, I was the one who got bullied and when I look back on it now and on most days when people don't recognise me and mistake me for either a garda or a rugby player, it's hard to believe that I was the guy who endured all the bullying at school and on top of the bullying I was sexually abused, viciously abused, for almost a year and I was trying to weigh up in one hand the bullying and in the other the abuse at an age where most kids were more interested in watching Top of the Pops or playing football or just getting on with being, with being, but for so long I was haunted by a gang of bastards who made my life hell, I was haunted by a complete and utter bastard who took away everything that was valuable to me and I dealt with this or I thought I dealt with it.

When you are full of life and when you can stand up and take on the teachers and when you can beat the daylights out of the kids in the class around you, there is very little that gets to you, but I found as the days and weeks and months went on after my experience at the hands of these guys in school and at the hands of this particular member of a religious order, my life was slowly wearing away to the point where, at the age of 15 I thought it would be much easier just to kill myself. People say 15 is a bit young to feel suicidal and that's the strange thing about suicidal tendencies there is no age that's too young or too old and all I can remember about those days when I lived my life on my own, literally on my own, was that it would be easier to stop the pain by ending my life. I couldn't face my Inter Cert, I had responsibilities as a patrol leader in a scout troop which I enjoyed, I was a pretty good student, I was a model child, I was a good son, I was a good brother, but all this time at the back of my mind what had happened me on both sides was wearing me down.

Some people say to me would you have got depressed if these things hadn't happened you, but that's a bit like saying how long is a piece of string, I'll never know, but all I know is that these two experiences on an ongoing basis over a couple of years, shaped my life, it shaped my life.

Eventually, I cracked when I was 15 and I decided that I would either die or I would have to admit to somebody that I was in the process of dying and my life was a complete mess. I managed to do OK at my exams just about scrapped through, but the pressure at that stage I was just 15/16 was just too intense, it was too much to bear. You have to remember that in 1972/73 there were no counsellors trained to deal with sexual abuse because there was no such thing as sexual abuse, the term didn't exist, it was un contemplated that this would happen to anybody, so consequently, I was the only one who actually thought that I was the only one that this had happened to. I really believed that I was the only one in the whole world who had let myself down by letting myself get involved in this situation.

I eventually told my mother, I thought it would break her heart but I reckoned that she was a lot older, she was a good woman, she was a tough woman, she still is a great woman and I told her and I took the chance and it was probably the best thing I could have done because we managed to get over it, or so I thought, and life became good again. She helped me through it, we decided not to go to the police because I thought for a start they would lock me up, there was no way they were going to go after a member of a religious order. This man was beyond anything that he could be accused of.

It became easier, I got on with my life, I got a job when I left school, I started going out with girls, it turned out to be a pretty good life but what I didn't realise was that somewhere deep inside me I had been moulded, that I had allowed myself to be framed for what was about to happen to me which took, probably, about 20 years.

A series of calamities in my life including a bad business venture which I got involved in, a case of severe bullying at work some years ago, all of these things took their toll. About 5 years ago I knew there was something seriously wrong with whatever it was going on inside me, I realised one day that I was just surviving, I was existing, I had no life, I had no desire to have a life, I just got on with it. I thought up to that that this had been the hand I had been dealt.

I was presenting an early morning radio show at the time, so it was easy to hide it, all I knew I had to do was get on the radio for 2 hours and sound good, that way I

kept the job, that way I kept my house, that way the structure of my life seemed normal to the outside world and this is what most people can't understand, how can you keep this picture propped up on it's easel and I did and it's only since realising whats going on behind the scenes and from talking to other people that I've realised so many people continue to do that and they are able to do it for a while.

But eventually, it slips, eventually the roller coaster slows down and before you know it you're up on the top and you're looking down. About five years ago it had reached probably it's worst insofar as I didn't feel anything any more. I used to just spend my time in my bedroom, I'd go to work, I hid it, I didn't know what it was, I lost 3 stone in six months, I thought it was cancer, I suffered ferocious headaches, I thought it was a brain tumour but being a bloke there was no way I was going to go to a doctor and say, what's wrong with me ? It's extraordinary how guys will sit in front of a television set for hours on end rather than discuss what they think is wrong with them and that's what we do and that hasn't changed.

I thought the easiest way out was just to finish it but thankfully I have got this awful, awful low tolerance to pain. When I think of the considerations I used to give to the various methods, there's a railway track that runs close to my house, I came in on the train on that railway track tonight, the Sligo train goes through there most evenings at about 70mph and I thought, that would be quick. Then I thought what would it feel like when the engine would hit you, and I thought about hanging and I thought about borrowing a shotgun from a guy I knew who had a gun licence and I thought about taking an overdose but I didn't know quite know how many to take. I was absolutely terrified by these thoughts because all along I was rearing 3 kids, or at least I thought I was, I was doing a job that most people thought was the best job in the world, he sounds like he's just won the Lotto every time we hear him and yet I couldn't get rid of these thoughts out of my head.

I think the catalyst for me, and depression never entered it, I never thought for a minute that I had depression, because I always typecast people who suffered from depression. They were either people who lost their jobs and had been out of work for years, they were people who were suddenly bereaved and tragically missed the people who had died in their lives. I couldn't figure out how it was that I could suffer from depression when I had a brilliant job, I was very well paid, I had huge

responsibilities, I drove a beautiful car and to everybody around me on the outside of the shell, I had a wonderful life.

The catalyst came when a very close friend of mine hanged himself and I had seen him in a shop a couple of weeks beforehand and I said I must talk to him, we've got to acknowledge that the two of us need help here, I knew he was getting help and I wanted to know what sort of help he was getting. I wanted somebody who understood partly why I spent so much time on my own to tell me that I was going to be okay and I thought maybe if I acknowledge that he's not right, he'll turn around and tell me well neither are you but we can get through this together. I stopped him in the shop that night and he turned around to me and he walked away and I drove for about 2 hours that night because I really thought I had messed up, I had upset him, I had made things worse for him. Two weeks later, he died.

I think his death was the catalyst I needed because what happened then was a lot of things began to come home to me and I began to think you're not as strong as you thought you were, I used to think he was stronger than I was, he was, he was a wonderful guy, he still gives me strength every day, but I thought to myself if he's capable of doing it, so are you. And I needed to get help.

I had a wonderful GP who was able to diagnose within three minutes that I was suffering from severe depression, and I remember when he mentioned the word depression I shook my head and I thought no, that's not me. But then a little voice somewhere said yes it is, it is you, and strangely enough the weight I felt being lifted off my shoulders was quite amazing, it was almost as if this man had given vindication, he had validated the fact that I needed help, I needed support and I use the word support rather than help. I didn't want help, I wanted somebody who could support me and in order to support somebody you've got to be able to understand them, and this man understood me, this man talked but more importantly he listened, he only nodded when I knew he knew what I was talking about, he didn't use small talk, he didn't stop me and say, I know what's wrong with you I'm going to give you some medication. He listened and that was the greatest morning I'd had in a long, long time because here was a medical professional who was worth his weight in terms of empathy, personality and support.

This is why I say to people, if you feel you're not getting your value's worth from your doctor, fire him because always remember he works for you. It's a thing we Irish people seem to think we have to agree with everything and accept everything our doctor tells us. We don't have to accept anything. If you've ever left your car in for a service and the foreman comes out and he gives you the bill and what you thought was going to cost of €150 and there's €1500 with 21% VAT on it, you're not going to pay €1500 you're going to say - what the hell is this. I could buy a new car for this. Yet we still turn around when it comes to the doctor and we still say okay, you're right. How do you know? What does he know about depression? There's a lot of doctors who know a lot about depression but it takes somebody to suffer from depression to know really what depression is all about.

I hate the word depression and I guess if I was to ask for a show of hands here tonight of who hates the word depression, I think every hand would show. The reason I hate the word depression is because it tells me nothing about my experience and I think if you use the expression emotional crisis or mood disorder well then people begin to say, yeah it's all about emotions, it's about feelings, it's about crying, it's about getting angry, it's about getting anxious, it's about having panic attacks, it's about not being able to sleep, it's about being shattered all day and wide awake all night, it's about having strange dreams and thinking weird things, it's about not eating, it's about not being able to have sex, they are all feelings. I hate the notion of being referred to as mentally ill. I'm not mentally ill. I never was and never will be. When you get heart burn you don't have congenital heart disease, when you get an ulcer it doesn't turn into stomach cancer, when you get a migraine you don't have a brain tumour, when you get depressed you're not mentally ill.

So what is depression? Depression is the icing on the cake. You end up with a tooth ache you get a shot before the dentist fills your tooth. The tooth ache is only there because you've a hole in your tooth. If the dentist actually says to you, I forgot to actually fill your tooth and when the anaesthetic wears off you're going to have a horrible pain again. Do you think that makes sense? So depression for me is the fog that comes down and covers the problem that needs to be solved. So what's the problem?

Many people can point to problems and say well this is my problem and that happened me years ago and I didn't move on and I didn't resolve it and I didn't go to the right source and I didn't go to the right therapist and other people will say I haven't got a clue what happened me and yet I'm depressed. There are many, many reasons why every single one of us will encounter some form of depression in our lifetime. It doesn't have to be an immediate problem that you can write on a blackboard, it can be a period in your life where suddenly something begins to go horribly wrong and everything falls apart.

Helpless, whenever you feel helpless and everyone here tonight can relate to the feeling of helplessness but when you feel helpless for too long, you will get depressed, you will feel worthless. Nothing had to happen in your life that you can put your finger on, no one had to die, no business had to go belly up but what happened was you found yourself out of an environment that you felt in control of for a long, long time and I think now that whenever you take yourself out of the situation you have been accustomed to for so long surrounded by the people who you've loved socialising with, you've loved living with, who've been the cornerstones of your life, take yourself out of that situation or get something else to take you out of that situation, like a job loss or winning the lottery. All of those situations isolate you, they make you different to the people who you are with, they take you away from the situation that you've been synonymous with for as long as you can remember and you feel isolated and all that it takes is not necessarily a problem but a period of isolation that you've no control over and you will feel depressed.

The reason I hate the word depression is because every time it's mentioned for some strange reason it becomes synonymous with suicide. People think, oh God, I have it for life, I can't tell my friends, I can't tell my boss, I often think if we could use another word, it wouldn't be as serious as a lot of people make it out to be. Short term depression can be a very good thing because what it does is it makes us stop on the outside and it makes us go back inside and look at what's going on inside and I think most people who are here tonight who have come through a depressed period will tell you their lives have never been the same again, they have never been the same again, it's been a complete shift, a complete change in every conceivable area of their lives.

I found once I went on my own medication, I tried cypramil which is one of the newer anti-depressants and I had a horrific reaction to it so I was taken off that and I was put on prothyadon which is one of the very old anti-depressants and I always say if they ever want to knock one of elephants in Dublin Zoo out, just give them a couple of prothyadon – they made me sleep believe me, for days.

And it began to work, after a couple of months I began to see things that I hadn't noticed for years, like the beauty of a blue sky and sunshine, the nice feeling you get when you're out for a walk and you're not afraid to walk on your own, you can pick nice places to walk and you can walk along the side of a canal without thinking of jumping in and you can follow the railway track without waiting for the Sligo train to come along. So I found that these tablets began to give me an edge, they began to give me a curiosity, but unfortunately that's where it stopped. I remember I went back to the doctor and said, great I'm smiling, looking good, I feel good, I'm eating, putting weight back on, doing a little exercise, I'm walking, I feel good about going into work, I'm not dragging myself around, I'm not a cranky bastard any more, what now ? And he said to me, keep taking the tablets. I said, but I don't want to take the tablets for long, and he said well just stay on them. I said why and he said because if you come off them you may slip back and I kept coming back to this thinking well if you were a dentist and you filled my tooth, when the anaesthetic wears off I wouldn't have a pain any more. So you're telling me you've given me an anaesthetic but you're not going to bother filling the tooth, so I have to keep on giving myself this anaesthetic all the time. He said basically, yes.

I said well I don't go along with that and he said well you'll be a first and he said to me what are you going to do about it. I said I'm going to stay on them for a year, because I was terrified to come off them, I was terrified of the thoughts, feelings, dreams, nightmares and the tendencies that were there when I came off the first set and I didn't want them back. But I didn't want to live in this big bubble that I had kind of disappeared into. Life was grand but I was like a roly ball and I just rolled along.

I went looking for answers and nobody could give me answers, and doctors would say, well text books say, and research shows, and statistics prove and blah, blah, blah, blah and I thought, oh God, I'm back to square one, and I checked the internet

and I bought books and I eventually thought the only way to do it was to go back studying again, studying me, studying what it was that was doing this to me, and to take myself apart a little bit and to look inside and it took a lot because initially I didn't have the energy to get out of bed and ironically the tablets that were prescribed for me that would make my mind feel better made my body feel like the wreck of the Hesperus. I was on the floor of the ocean and I thought, I don't want this for the rest of my life and so I started studying and I looked at a number of areas of psychology, not traditional psychology because traditional psychology to a degree gives you all the why answers, tells you why this happened, why you're doing this, why that's gone wrong, why you were like that back then. I didn't want to know why, I was fed up listening to why, why, why, why.

Some of the therapists and counsellors I went to would turn around and say well it's like this, this is why you're feeling this way and this is why you're not moving on. I wanted to know how, because for me why dealt with the past, I was sick of the past. I had given up drinking so my head was like an alarm bell it was so sharp, I was sick of the people I was drinking with, all they wanted to do was drink and I didn't want to drink. I was hungry for information, I was hungry to know how could I move on, how could I get myself to a point where I could fully take charge of my life again.

So I started to investigate the hows, and it might sound very strange but when I didn't get answers to the how questions, I used to make up the answers. How am I going to get from here to here ? There were no answers but yet when I said to myself, how do you think it would be possible to get from here to here ? Eventually I began to find answers but it took a very long time, but I was pretty happy with the answers I was getting. I was still in a very debilitated state but I managed to get there and a year later almost to the day I stopped taking my medication. With the help of my doctor, I weaned myself off the anti-depressant medication over a three month period, it was rocky but it was no rockier than if you give up drinking coffee having been drinking 9 or 10 cups a day or if you give up cigarettes having smoked 40 or 50 a day. I got a bit tetchy, I was very nervous, I felt very exposed because suddenly all this sharpness was coming back in to me, I was going through a kind of a cold turkey type of thing.

That's not mental illness. I'm not a doctor - I have no medical qualifications, I now have a series of psychology qualifications, I still don't know the answers, but what I've learned has helped me, it has given me a quality of life that I never thought I would have. Now I dictate my own life, I stick with people who are positive, people who really, really want to know how, not people who keep telling me why, like I did for so long, I always wanted to sit with people and tell them why, this was why this happened, and do you know why, and I would tell the same story over and over again. Eventually, I started meeting people who were saying do you know how you can get here, do you know how this can work, and this fired me up and I loved it.

It's very important that we place trust in the medical profession but it's equally important that we don't give our trust away to the medical profession. There are many, many fine doctors and psychiatrists who are looking for the answers that maybe you already have. Doctors are becoming more and more prepared to listen to our experience these days because if they don't suffer from depression they can only learn from text books and research and statistics and reports. That's not real experience, I don't want to see pi-charts and block graphs, I want to hear people's stories. I always say the opposite to depression is expression, if you can express, talk, speak, tell, scream, shout, cry, you are diluting this thing that can take a very hard and strong hold on you.

I remember when I was studying I was absolutely stunned to find out that the longest we can stay in any one state is 90 seconds. Do you know what that means? It means we can only be depressed at any one time for 90 seconds, after that something changes, we move into a different way of thinking, we move into a different feeling, a different area, but that gave me great hope to think that hold on for a minute if I'm only like this for 90 seconds well then I'm going to be like something else in 90 seconds. I could try to be like something else in 90 seconds, how can I do that?

I was at a funeral a couple of months back of a guy who shot himself and there was a very sombre gathering after the funeral and I overheard a friend of the guy's wife saying, wasn't he a terrible selfish bastard to do that. I was very tempted to turn around to her and light on her and give her a piece of my mind. And then there were the people who were saying, it must have taken a lot of balls to do that, he

must have been a very strong, very courageous man to actually pick up that gun. In effect, neither of those things are true. My best friend wasn't a selfish bastard, he was one of the greatest men I've ever known. He worked in one of the greatest professions in the world, he was fire officer, he would jump the walls in the neighbourhood at 3 or 4 in the morning with his first aid kit to help kids with high temperatures, he'd mess around with your back door lock if you left your keys inside and locked yourself out, he was always on call. The problem was he wasn't on call for himself. He wasn't a selfish bastard, he was the epitome of the opposite and I'm not quite sure what the words are to describe that but all I know is he was an extraordinary man in every conceivable positive kind way that I can think of and it didn't take a lot of courage to do what he did. He didn't want to die, he just wanted to stop the pain and the pain became so bad and when pain becomes that bad and anyone who has suffered absolutely excruciating pain, how many of you in your worst moment have said please put a pillow over my head and shoot me the headache is so bad. He didn't want to die he just wanted the pain to stop.

We've really got to do some hard work and hard thinking on how we can help people get beyond the suicidal tendency and back to whatever the resource they can find within themselves that will lead them to go on to live a contented life. We all have the resources we need inside us, the problem is that when the fog comes down we limit our choices and when your choices are limited, your hands are tied and you are helpless and that's how I felt for a long, long time, I was helpless. I couldn't help myself. I remember a couple of years ago a young guy who was doing his final exams in university and he came to see me and he said my results are due in a weeks time but I know I'm not going to pass and I'm thinking of killing myself. The temptation would have been to say why but I didn't and I said to him what resource do you need right now that will guarantee you a good, contented life, that you would be happy to live. He's an engineer, he earns a lot of money and he's going to get married in October.

I think all it takes is to understand that we don't have the answers, sometimes we don't need answers, what we need is more choices, and the more choices we have at our disposal makes it possible not to always need answers, choices are what makes the world go around, lack of choices brings the world to a grinding halt.

I think if we all go away tonight with one thing in mind I'd like it to be that we all take a different view of depression, that we minoritise it, that we make it smaller, that we turn it into a toothache rather than a volcano and that what we start to look at is the fact that we are all vulnerable, that we can all suffer from an emotional crisis, that none of us is mentally ill, that really we've all got opportunities to increase the choices in our lives but in order to do that we've got to take back control. When I look back and look at my depression I think, I was an active participant in that. I didn't think so at the time I thought somebody else had caused it and I thought that the medical profession were going to make me better. Wrong wrong, no win situation. As long as we think that depression is nothing to do with us and that the medical profession are going to help us to recover from it, it's not going to work.

What will work is if we accept that by increasing the number of choices in our lives the fog will lift and the only way we can do that is by talking about it because the longer we stay quiet the faster the choices dissipate and disappear.

People say to me do you get depressed, are you on medication ? I'm not on medication, I try to stay well, I might not be a great advert for staying well half the time but I do try to remember that I have a choice in everything I do, every time I put my right foot forward I have a choice.

I would like to just reserve my final word for anybody who might be feeling suicidal and this is an area where you've got to realise more than ever where you've got to accept you've got a choice. If I'd made the wrong choice four years ago I wouldn't be here tonight, I wouldn't be as happy as I am, I wouldn't have been able to enjoy the good weather in Dublin today and I wouldn't have been able to have tonight to look forward to, to come along here to talk. Please remember always weigh up the choice that you have, it might be a very limiting choice but remember one thing none of us knows what lies beyond that final moment. It is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

I've learned more about myself in the last 3 years and anyone I talk to about depression, I always say learn about yourself, don't be afraid to learn about yourself because the more you learn about yourself the more you like yourself and the things you dislike about yourself the easier they are to shake off and its very important that

you are not dragging something behind you, I'd much rather be pushing something in front of me rather than dragging something behind me that I can't see.

If somebody had said to me four years ago, this is a great life, I would have just said "piss off". Now I'm reluctant to actually say to people this is a great life but I do feel it's a great life, I believe it. I have bad days but that's all they are they are only bad days and there are far more good days than bad days and it is true that if we didn't have the occasional bad day, we'd never enjoy the good days and the great moments the good days bring and I think it's all about choice and it's all about what you value most.

Thank you very much.

Prof. Malone: Well, I'm quite sure that is just the beginning of your appreciation for that journey. What we thought we'd do now is, thank you Gareth on behalf of everybody, what we thought we'd do now is what we've done previously is we'd like to take a couple of questions, and if you'd keep them to questions, for Gareth and then we'll wind up and we have complimentary tea and coffee afterwards. We have offered to sell some of Gareth's books outside for those of you interested in buying "A Day Called Hope" and I think you are willing to sign some of those, thanks Gareth. So we'll see if we can take half a dozen questions and it's really for Gareth to answer so we'll start here.

Question: Having heard you on the radio sir, I travelled up to hear Gareth and because myself and Gareth have travelled together a few occasions before so we know each other well, I have a lot of things I wanted to say, number one, well done kid. Thanks John. If I could for a moment I'd like to ask why is it that (walks stooped over) the acceptable face of mental illness in this country, why is it that people can stumble, I walked like that, there's nothing physically wrong with me and people who treat me accept my walking around like that and to me that is criminal that that is acceptable, that is what the medication does, that's question number one, I find that horrendous. Number two, your point on the treatment that it is an emotional illness is absolutely so well made that I couldn't agree more. This is not mental illness, this is an emotional illness and I can't remember, and I wonder can you remember, the last time somebody in the medical profession hugged you, held

you by the hand or treated you in any kind of an emotional fashion, and the training, because I'm now doing what you're doing, I'm studying psychology, and the training will tell you to do the opposite to people who need it more than any other illness in the world. They need to be treated in an emotional fashion and I wonder have you any experience of that because I certainly don't. Number three the topic here tonight, it's time we got away from the word, people die from their own emotional illness, we don't need to be stigmatised in death as we are already stigmatised in life. I spent the last three weeks resisting dying, I was locked away in my house with my lovely wife minding me for the past three weeks, dying from my emotional illness, and had I died from my emotional illness I would've had people making the comments at my graveside in front of my family who would've stigmatised me into death with this illness that they stigmatised me with in life but I refused to accept it in life and damn it we should not accept it in death. You don't die from suicide you die from your emotional illness and I wish you would change the word because it is not fair to anybody. I know people who smoke 80 cigarettes a day and have died from cancer and nobody has accused them of killing themselves, I know people who are 23 stone and they died from heart disease because they ate themselves to death and they were told if they didn't stop they would die but nobody accused them of suicide. I know people who drank themselves to death and nobody accused them of suicide and I would stand at their gravesides and I'd hear about the great fight they made. I'm fighting this for 7 years and I'm still going to fight it and I will win the battle but I won't win the battle as long as this word suicide is hanging around in my head and in my family's heads so we need to get rid of that stigma, we're badly stigmatised in life so lets not be stigmatised in death and I really wish you'd change the name on the sign.

Gareth: Thanks John, on your point I think if a member of the medical profession hugged me I'd get the feeling he was trying to hold me down until the ambulance arrived ! Or else I'd paid too much ! My feelings, and I reiterate, I've no medical qualifications and having had a chat with Kevin before we spoke tonight, Kevin is doing amazing work, there are so many specialists in this area who will throw their hands up in the air and say, we don't know, we don't know, we can only go on looking but I think the great thing and the positive thing for me is that more and more eminent psychiatrists are prepared to listen to our experience whereas before that was not the case, you were told to do what you had to do and if not you were

locked up for your own good. And now I think there's a mild breeze blowing through the medical profession and there are a lot of medical professionals arguing with each other which is also something that never happened before.

I can't speak on behalf of the field of psychiatry but on my own journey depression is an element of human nature. You know there are great arguments about serotonin deficiency, brain chemical imbalances, genetic defects and hereditary causes, so what, at the end of the day. I read in the Guardian last week that 80% of doctors questioned in a survey last month admit that they dish out too many anti-depressants because there aren't other forms of therapy available to individuals. In the same survey one in three patients that consulted their GP was suffering from depression, one in three. So the people who say one in ten, I think by modern day standards I think things are changing rapidly but I also think that the whole medical profession's attitude to the whole thing is changing, maybe not as quickly as we'd like it to but it is changing, I feel, and that's coming from a layman's point of view but thanks John and great to see you.

Prof. Malone: I must say I share your concerns about the whole stigma, I don't think we're going to get rid of the word suicide, in fact, some of you heard me on the radio last week with Leo Enright and there was a piece before me, a couple of pieces before me and they talked about a young fellow who was in difficulty and they kept saying they were afraid he was going to do something awful, something awful was going to happen him. What they were concerned about was that he was going to take his own life, that he was going to die by suicide. Now I will meet you half way John, I agree with you about the whole stigma and I think it's a terrible tragedy the label of suicide, and what I would like you to go away from this meeting with, and everyone of you today, and this is not something I've come up with. I went to Canada two years ago to review a suicide research centre that had been funded through generous endowment by a lovely lady whose son had died by suicide. He was a doctor with bipolar mood disorder who had died, and she decided, in his memory, to put together this centre for treatment and research of suicide. I was the external reviewer, in other words, were they doing their job, etc., should she fund them for another five years and she'd given \$2 million and the university had given \$2 million to keep this centre going and I was the external reviewer and fortunately the internal reviewer said when he introduced himself because we interviewed all the

different scientists and then we wanted to meet the donor, the lady who was funding the centre and the chief interviewer who was not a psychiatrist, he said to lady, about your son, very sorry for your son who committed suicide. She said, excuse me my son did not commit suicide, he did not commit a crime, he did not commit a felony, it was a tragedy that he died by suicide.

We can't take the word suicide out of the equation but we can certainly uncouple the word commit, because you commit a crime, you commit a felony, it's not a crime or a felony, it's a tragedy and so you die by suicide. That would be my answer to that.

Question: Gareth, my name is Jim McDonell. Today is a very important day in my life because this time last year I started to recover from depression which is an expression you use in your book and I must say that as I progressed, the only way that I could improve was by reading what you had said and could express myself in the way that you put certain aspects of the emotional illness that was there and I would like to thank you very, very much for being able to allow me to express that to other people and to help me in my recovery.

Gareth: Thank you so much Jim.

Question: Would you have any group aids or maybe you could explain what aids you would have had, other people that you would have been in a group with or did you just do it alone ?

Gareth: No I tried to latch on to people who made me feel good. I lost a lot of people who I considered friends although I know now that they weren't friends. I think people get together for very different reasons but I think that when you arrive at a point in life where the emotional crisis is almost serious enough to merit taking your own life, once you move beyond that, the last thing you want to be reminded about is the old life that you left behind and I think I found that by surrounding myself, and this might sound selfish, it is selfish, we're all selfish, it's perfectly okay to be selfish, provided we're not hurting anybody else, you know, but I think it was very important for me to find people who made me feel the need to look for the resources that gave me happiness, that gave me contentment. I didn't necessarily find that in group sessions, I found it through individuals that I met, that I was lucky

to meet, and I believe there are a lot of individuals all over the place if we are just prepared to listen to what they have to say. You know the people who bring you down, there is no shortage of them, you can't afford to hang around them and I sometimes think that people who suffer from depression are givers, they're caretakers themselves, they have a lot to give and unfortunately they end up trying to nurse the people who are trying to bring them down. It's a Catch 22 situation so really my highest recommendation would be to align yourself with people who are going to make you feel good about yourself because I guarantee you that if you feel good about yourself in their company you're making them feel good about themselves too. So that would be my advice in that area.

Question: You sort of answered my question a bit there as well because when you are lying in bed and you said you had a choice, but if you haven't got the physical and mental strength to get up and take that choice, how did you get on with that ?

Gareth: Sit on the side of the bed, think about putting your shoes on. I remember in the weeks that I began to get a little bit better, I decided I'd go and look at a new pair of trainers because the sight of a new pair of trainers worked ahead to give me an indication that maybe if I got a comfortable pair of trainers I'd eventually begin to exercise and I bought them and they sat there for days but eventually I put them on and I walked around the house in them and I think when you do this you're sending good messages inside. You know the body is a strange thing, people think that all the thinking we do is done between the ears, it's not, it's been proved biologically physically, every cell in the human body has a brain and a mind of its own so if you put shoes on your feet that are going to make your feet feel good well that good feeling will transfer to a lot of different areas in your body and you actually begin to want to get dressed again and get out a little bit. I think we don't place enough trust or courage in ourselves, we tend to rely too heavily, I found anyway, on the doctor or the neighbour and I think when you begin to take back a little bit of control, piece by piece, the sight of a nice pair of trainers and you think I could look well in them, that's your body telling you, you will look well in them, buy them. So if you don't feel like getting out of bed, just get up and sit on the side of the bed and eventually, if you sit on the side of the bed for long enough you will want to get out of the bed, that's what I felt anyway. It took a few days to get that far but it will happen, so don't feel that you are relying on your will to do this there are a lot of

things going on inside us that we are not even aware of but the problem is that in a situation like this it's much easier to think negatively, to feel negatively, whereas I think if you actually force yourself just for a few minutes now and again to think positive, and if I can't think positively I'm not going to think at all. I think that is the start, small steps eventually will lead to bigger steps.

Thank you.

Prof. Malone: What the 3T's is trying to do is empowering charities, empowering people and my understanding of the message from Gareth is very much one of empowerment and not to be passive and sit there and take whatever is dished up and to question it, that's my understanding of part of what he is saying so really the design of this lecture series is about including people, there's no mirror, there is no wall between you and Gareth, he was right amongst you, and he was certainly giving a very strong message. So if you wouldn't mind showing your appreciation for Gareth's contribution tonight and then I'll just finish with a couple of housekeeping messages. So once again, thank you Gareth O'Callaghan.

I think, we could still be here two hours from now having listened to him but it was a treasure and a pleasure. Now we have tea and coffee organised complimentary courtesy of Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre who are sponsoring this lecture series. Our next meeting is on the 20th May, where we have Don Baker who has agreed to step up to the plate, that is Thursday, 20th May at 8pm. The mini marathon, don't forget about, I mentioned the golf tournament which last year had 60 golf clubs taking part, there are 180 clubs taking part this year so we're really getting the message out and it's really about power to the people. So please, the books are available outside and Gareth will be around for a while to sign those, so enjoy you're tea and coffee and safe home. Thank you.