Press Release: Tuesday April 25th 2017

STEPHEN FRY

Stephen Fry opened his talk at The Cambridge Union by saying that mental health is too important a subject to take seriously and that people only understand mental health from its embodiment and their experiences of it. Stephen talked about how he grew up in the countryside and he was aware from a young age that he was different to his classmates and family. When asked when he knew about his sexuality he says when he was born and jokes ‘that was the last time I’m going up one of those!’

He went on to discuss the beauty of language and the art of processing words. After watching Oscar Wilde’s, ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’, he realised that one can use language in extraordinary ways. He talked about the mobile library that came to his town and the book ‘The Trials of Oscar Wilde’ which bewildered and horrified him as he caused the first scandal and Stephen recognised that Wilde’s sin was stirring inside him too. He realised his love of language from reading this. Unlike other children at school, he had no interest in sport or rock music, instead finding interest in Greek mythology and literature.

He was expelled three times from school and ended up in prison. However, he turned himself around and was accepted to study at Cambridge University. He claims that if he had been diagnosed earlier, perhaps he would have had ADHD, as he was ‘flying all over the place.’ He always had a curiosity about history, the world and literature which he described as a burning energy inside of him and greed to find out about the world. He was aware of a peculiarity inside of him and that he was different, not only with his sexuality. When he was young he thought, ‘this dark inner thing was something I would have to keep quiet for the rest of my life.’ He questions whether or not Bipolar disorder is a good or bad thing and after leaving Cambridge he discovered how crucial it is to understand how serious mental health disorders are. He likens a mood disorder to the weather, it is not your fault when it’s raining, it’s not permanent but it is real. You feel this black and this terrible and you cannot pretend that you don’t. He assured that it will be sunny someday but you do not know when and you have no control over it.

Fry questioned, ‘If you have that kind of mood disorder, what does one usually do to make things better?’ You reach out to drugs and alcohol as they can bring you up and down, balancing your moods. He stated that all this noise in my head can be silenced by another tablet, or a glass of wine. This however, leads to dependency and people ‘slide down’ and lose their jobs and become a nuisance in society, a sad story told every night on the streets.

On the other hand, it is possible to lead an enriching life with these diagnoses, mentioning authors, politicians, poets and artists. It is important to understand its potential to enhance life and that it is not a death sentence. He quoted, ‘Don’t take away my devils, for my angels will flee too,’ suggesting that if asked to ‘turn off bipolar disorder’ then one loses the grandiosity of life.

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