

Glenurquhart high school

December 2014

Hello

Thank you so much for allowing me to speak to you today.

I have to say that I am a bit nervous, a bit uncertain about how you will react to what I say.

My name is Graham Morgan. I am here to talk about one aspect of me which is that I have a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia

I have no idea what you might think about such an illness or whether you have been influenced by the popular perceptions of such a condition.

I do know that in the past people had horrendous views of people like me and yet I know that many many young people understand things like this far better than I did when I was your age. But I also remember that a couple of years ago we asked young people whether a person like me should look after children and they almost all said people like me shouldn't be near children.

And I remember that when my son was sixteen he asked his best friend what he would think if he told him that his dad had schizophrenia and his friend replied and said "wow that would be an amazing horror story" and my son then decided not to tell other people about my illness.

And I remember that my ex wife always tried to keep my illness a secret as she was frightened of how other children would treat my son at school if they knew.

And this is not surprising.

Such views and fears about mental illness are common place, you only have to turn the telly on to see some film about psycho killers or a detective drama with strange and weird people who are meant to be like me to think this way and let us be honest on very rare, rare, occasions people who are very ill and very disturbed have done some terrible things.

This is not a good start to a day like this is it? Here you are for a stigma busting day and I am busy talking about harsh and sad and worrisome things.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself.

I am fifty one years old although sometimes I think I have only just reached adulthood. I used to be married to a lovely woman and have a son who is twenty two years old. I live alone in Nairn where I am very happy and very content.

I spend a lot of time walking the beach or sitting at the end of the harbour watching the sea and listening to the oystercatchers and seagulls and the wind and the waves. I baby sit Emma's young children every Monday which I love doing; listening to Cora wittering away while she gets ready for bed, or carrying her upstairs, or reading her a story while she sits on my knee is a lovely feeling. Talking to Molly while she tries to delay going up to bed is great.

And I am also spending my time being in love, Wendy is my partner now, we are learning new languages of speaking to each other, we are learning trust and giving, we are still full of silliness and the desire to kiss each other again and again, we are planning a future together and creating dreams and just having a wonderful time. I feel like some old grumpy dog that has been transformed into a puppy and I am very happy.

I work with HUG, who you will be hearing about later in the form of SPEAK. I have an MBE for services to mental health. I was once a yacht skipper and know what it is like to be in the middle of the Atlantic watching dolphins and whales and diving birds in the Sargasso sea or sailing in the Philippines among islands with coconuts and mangoes and white, white, beaches.

I have had a wonderful life. A life I am privileged and lucky to have experienced. I have fantastic friends, I have a great job I have a good income I have a future I look forward to.

And yet also I have this diagnosis of schizophrenia. I don't know what to tell you about it.

My wife would say it is the reason our marriage fell apart, my son would say it is part of the reason that he hasn't spoken to me for the last five years and the reason that I do not know where he lives or what he does any more.

And yes life is sad and can be very hard.

I first went into hospital when I was 21. At that time I was filled with anger at my upbringing and at my parents and life had become a blur of hopelessness. Such a blur that when I took an overdose I refused to let my parents know that I was in hospital and such a blur that I then told my parents that I blamed them for all the unhappiness I was feeling.

It is only many decades later that I am aware how much love and support my family have given me over the years and how hard it has been for them to witness the places I get into.

Not long after my son was born I became very, very, very tired, exhausted almost and in this time of what should have been and in many ways was wonderful, I lost my grasp of reality.

Or at least people tell me I lost my grasp of reality.

And this is sort of what schizophrenia can be about. I will tell you about it in the way that someone describing it from the outside would maybe describe it.

I became full of delusions, I thought that I was evil, I thought that spirits were changing my thoughts, I thought that my blood was full of devils and I thought that if I touched anyone, especially my wife or son they would in turn be affected by my evil.

I was so distressed and worried about this, so convinced that I was causing suffering that I became suicidal. I couldn't look at a bright light without thinking it had a devil in it warping my thoughts and I couldn't sleep or relax or stop thoughts rushing through my head.

And I am very lucky because I was taken into hospital and looked after until I stopped wanting to harm myself, until the medication kicked in and life became smooth again.

And that is how my life has been since then.

I sometimes get over stressed, I sometimes get filled with anxiety or very depressed and when this happens I start to drink even more than usual and at these times I often want to stop taking my medication.

And as this happens, I can believe people know what I am thinking, sometimes I can hear voices, but most often I go back into that world where I believe I am the most evil person that ever lived.

And then I am taken into hospital and because I find it impossible to believe that I am actually ill and not just evil I am detained because I refuse treatment and then by and by I sleep again, I stop being so jangled, I stop being so sad, so convinced I am harming people and then I can face the world again, go back to my friends, go back to my life, my work, my everyday existence.

And sometimes I am a wee bit lost, a wee bit dazed with my life. I do not feel in touch with my emotions, I do not see much joy around me, life becomes a bit grey, a bit covered in ashes.

But these are rare times, most of the time I am rushing around working and changing the world. I walk by rivers and sit in cafes and I talk with friends and I am walking with their dogs and children and life is the usual turmoil of ups and downs that it is for everyone.

And I know it is sometimes filled with sadness for those around me, I have such a clear memory of my brother's anger, he is a psychiatrist by the way, when I told him yet again that I don't really have an illness and that I don't want to take my medication.

And I remember my wife's despair and attempts to reach me when I was in hospital and I remember that my son witnessed me at numerous times when I

was so sad and unhappy that I wanted to die and even as I say this I feel my heart is heavy.

In my intellect I know that I have an illness, I know that it is a serious illness. In my heart I think there is nothing wrong with me.

And I am lucky because I have a community psychiatric nurse who I see regularly, and I have a psychiatrist I see every so often and a mental health officer and in the past a psychologist and when life is terrible I have hospital where I am kept safe.

Oh what a start to today!!

I finish by saying I am a person who wonders everytime what people will say when I tell them what my illness is, already I am wondering how you will be thinking of my story.

I am hoping that I haven't upset any of you I am also hoping that you don't think it is a story to laugh at. Like many of you, I am worried about how people think of me and want to be liked and respected. And I want to be understood.

That is slightly harder, and yet I am so lucky. I have such a wonderful circle of people around me who see me for the person I am, the person who will take a friend's child's hand and play with her in the playground, I will lie on my back on the roundabout and be twirled round and round by her and no one will bat an eye because it is just graham who spends a lot of his time in the café with his friend Emma and her children and all thought that it is Graham a person with schizophrenia putting a young child at risk is alien to everyone.

I am so glad you have listened to me.

I hope it was interesting.

I have a wonderful life, many people with schizophrenia do and often the earlier people get help the better their recovery, some people get completely well, some people like me are sometimes in hard places, some people are very disabled by it. All of us deserve treatment and compassion and the chance to be seen for who we are not who the media might say we are.

I am here all day and happy to answer any questions or talk to any of you.

And that is the end of my talk – it is a start to a day where we look at the stigma of mental illness and think about how important it is to see the person not just the label, a start to a day where we begin to realise that we all have both good and bad mental health and that even if the vast majority of you will not experience the things I have, you have the power and the capacity to look after your own mental health and if it suffers to get help and know that this is not such a bad thing to do. thank you so much