

Safe Spaces Event Was Thought Provoking

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By David F. Rooney - Editor

Thursday's Safe Spaces event, sponsored by Embrace BC, was a thought-provoking discussion about tolerance in our community.

The event featured Salmon Arm native Ryan Clayton, a well-known speaker about the need for tolerance in BC, and included music by Sharlene Foisy and a performance of excerpts from the play *Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*, by the play's young cast.

Organizer Laura Stovel said this was the first public event in Revelstoke to ever discuss the issues of sexual identity and homophobia.

Clayton, who is studying social work at the University of Victoria, was outed as a gay by a gossipy young girl when he was a teenager. He told the crowd of about 30 people who attended the Safe Spaces event at Conversations on the evening of April 10 that he has spent eight years speaking out about the need for tolerance and acceptance. This was his sixth trip to Revelstoke to speak to teens at RSS (he spoke to them that afternoon) and only the fourth time he has spoken at a non-school public event intended for the general public.

He said that in his experience there are few truly safe cities or towns where gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans-gendered people feel completely secure from prejudice and persecution. There are bigots just about everywhere — even Vancouver, which has a reputation for acceptance.

"I thought its streets were paved with rainbows," he said, alluding to the rainbow flag frequently used by the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered communities. "And though the city has actually painted rainbows on its crosswalks it's actually like everywhere else."

While that may well be true and a lot more work needs to be done to ensure that people of different sexual identities feel completely safe everywhere in BC and the rest of Canada, the situation has actually changed a great deal in the last 50 years.

Not until then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau said in 1967 that "there's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation" leading to the 1968 repeal of the law that made it illegal to be gay did social attitudes begin to change in Canada. Today, gays and lesbians can get married (Canada was the fifth country to make gay marriage legal), it is illegal to discriminate against gays, lesbians and others and even jokes about homosexuals and lesbians no longer considered socially acceptable. Books for children discuss homosexuals and what is happening in Russia where gays are beaten in the street is considered barbaric

and horrendous. Gay Pride parades and rallies are held in many cities across Canada — though not yet in Revelstoke — homosexuality is no longer generally considered weird, unnatural or a sin. Instead homosexuality is regarded as a sexual identity that you are born with. It is seen as being within the normal range of human sexual identities and practices and not a lifestyle choice.

That doesn't mean that it isn't difficult to deal with. While Clayton is a smart, happy, likeable, assertive and funny individual who you can't mistake for being other than well-adjusted, his sexual self-discovery was difficult. Clayton said he wondered what was wrong with himself because he wasn't attracted to girls. And when he told his dad he was gay, his father required a while to get used to the idea that his son was gay. His mother didn't find out until she heard about it via the gossip grapevine after he was publicly outed.

Clayton's story fascinated the mostly young audience and they asked several questions about his reaction to his self-discovery. His replies were often humorous but you had to know that it was still a sometimes painful episode in his life.

Just how difficult it can be for gay teens is one of the themes being explored by the young cast of *Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*. The young men and women of the cast performed three excerpts of the play, which is to be produced in the MacGregor Room at Powder Springs next month. Peppered with coarse language, *Dog Sees God*, is an exploration of sexuality, suicide, eating disorders, bullying, teen violence, rebellion, sexual relations, sexual identity and other themes of interest to teens. Written by Bert V. Royal, this 2004 play is very loosely based on Charles Schultz's *Peanuts* comic-strip characters. ([Please click here to read more about this play on Wikipedia.](#))

Judging by the skillful acting demonstrated during Safe Spaces, the play deserves to be well attended when it is performed next month.

Here are a few photos from Safe Spaces:



Singer/Songwriter Sharlene Foisy entertains the crowd of about 30 people who attended Thursday evening's Safe Spaces event at Conversations. The event featured speaker Ryan Clayton (right, seated with Laura Stovel and Bonnie Teed) who speaks out against homophobia and the need for tolerance. David F. Rooney photo



Salmon Arm native Ryan Clayton (center) speaks to an engage and curious audience at the Safe Spaces event. David F. Rooney photo



The cast of the upcoming Revelstoke Theatre Company production of *Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead* performed excerpts of the play for an appreciative audience. The award-winning play, first performed in 2004, is geared for teenagers and focuses on issues of sexuality, eating disorders, bullying, violence and drug and alcohol abuse. It will be performed in the MacGregor Room at Powder Springs next month. David F. Rooney photo



The cast of *Dog Sees God* pose with director Martin Ralph (right) after their performance at the Safe Spaces event. David F. Rooney photo