



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Matthew's destiny

Working with young people, lecturing, researching and heading the Department of Youth and Community Studies at the University of Malta is a privilege. This department is focused on developing professional youth workers who can respond to the needs of young people a responsibility.

fathom but not without its concerns. Whilst I do not subscribe to the stereotypical thinking that young people have their head in the clouds, I do acquaint myself with the notion that this part of the life course is indeed crammed with storm and stress because of the copious transitions they have to deal with.

Then again it is undeniably awful that young people have been ejected on the national agenda for so many wrong reasons these past weeks.

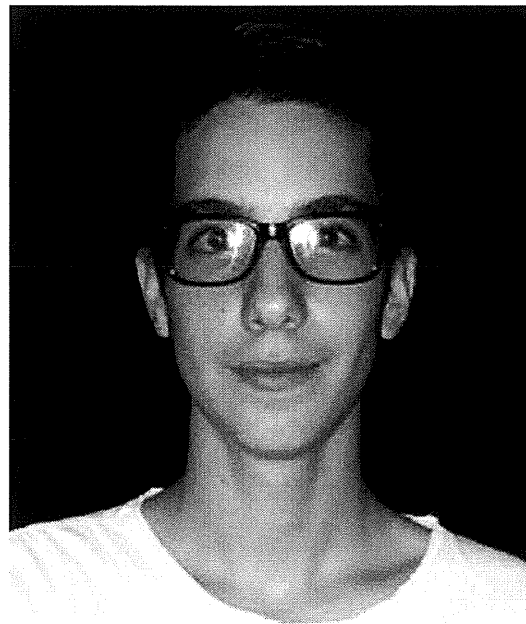
We had Matthew who passed away unexpectedly as he was entering the school he loved so much. The coroner said he died of 'natural causes', but if clinically that is what we call it, in terms of what it means to young people it is anything but ordinary.

Young people are designed to live, intended to have fun, considered to engage in life's challenges, set their pace, reverie their dreams. They are preordained to create pandemonium, to challenge, thrill and excite the rest of us. They are the embodiment of what it means to breathe. They are society's lungful of air. Matthew is a note in this symphony of life that has gone dreadfully silent.

Regrettably I did not have the privilege of knowing this young man but I know the school well. I was a student there some 30 years ago. It was, and has remained to this day, a community of learning and they must be suffering so much because of what has ensued. At a stage in my teaching career I even taught in this same school and was part of the guidance team.

It must have been some eight odd years ago – one of the most positive experiences I've had in my profession. This is a school community calculated around the needs of students, with committed educators and a support structure like no other. My respects are directed towards this community that must be living such a difficult moment. One of its own has gone and the school will bereave as it always did when such occasions concur.

Matthew, this handsome, big-hearted young man with so much life left in him shouldn't have died of a collapsed lung or of anything else for that matter. The deep vigorous expression in his gaze speaks a narrative that says it all – he was on top of the world. In the multitude of photos posted on the social media and the newspapers if felt so unnatural to have a young man slip away into eternal life – how frighteningly distressing. I really do not want to shoot down anyone's feelings on



Matthew Demicoli

worries they might have but until there is life, there are prospects for a better day and this is a lesson I learn every time I am faced with similar news. As long as we breathe our problems are not insurmountable.

Only God knows what pain and anguish his family must be going through as 'we speak' and what deep-seated soreness they are experiencing. His family and close friends know well-enough that there won't be the opportunity to call his name and get a response, hug him, ask him about the pranks he was involved in and the goals he is putting to himself.

What bigger ache is there than having to lay to rest your 'little ones'?

Matthew's loss is another dent for our communities. Burying our youth is always terrible, but seeing them pass away in such an unorthodox way without any notice is a bitter pill to swallow. Young people are there to give us hope, to inspire us, to challenge the way we are going about our business.

Being young should be about being buoyant not buried.

Matthew Demicoli's tragic demise should give us resolve to keep working hard to retain strong communities that can be of mutual support. Such tragedies remind us that we need to be the protective net for each other.

Unfortunately tragic stories

that revolve around young people keep happening all the time around us, some of which could be prevented.

For example, a fortnight or so ago we were talking about the terrible accident at one of Paceville's clubs that could have left even more victims.

Or if we had to look beyond our shores we would see young people suffering the brunt of extremism as a night out to dance to their favourite band tune in Bataclan in Paris ends up in complete bedlam. To add insult to injury it was young people themselves who turned their Kalashnikov's and explosives towards their peers.

But it is not all bleak – there is a silver lining. There are positive stories.

Much as I do not know voice or music, the sound of Destiny's song was absolutely glorious. Her success during the Junior Eurovision Song Contest was a wake-up call not only in terms of the music, the tune, the performance but a timely response that multiculturalism works, that integration can be successful and that Malta can be proud of all its children, whatever their roots and background. We are living that same excitement that her dad Nubisi used to create on the football pitch when still a prolific footballer (I must admit I wasn't too enthusiastic when Birkirkara FC faced Hibernians FC and Nubisi at the time!).

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Destiny isn't only beautiful outside, pretty and with a captivating smile, lovely shining eyes that light up the stage and the cameras but she is also a fine soul focused, sensitive and attentive to the good that those around share with her.

This week I also had the privilege to contribute to the CHOGM Youth Forum, another positive experience where a crowd of young people coming from so many different countries around the globe were engaged in a discussion about peace and concord. They have so many ideas on how to take the world forward, a world that 'us' adults have messed up big time.

Young people have solutions, they have ideas, they know what is required to make sure our social spaces, our countries and communities can move forward.

Young people can teach us how to live and how to have fun, how to value the good qualities we all have and put to good use, virtues and merits that can make us better people. Young people teach us social inclusion.

Matthew's death and Destiny's triumph are two very diverse narratives but with so much in common. They are two young people whose lives are symbolic of resilience and buoyancy. As we mourn Matthew and celebrate Destiny we need to be strong and turn our attention to young people's discourses. A coherent message comes out of both these young people's soul; celebrate and have fun because life is there to be lived.

“Ghandi xi Nghid”

19 681 843 844 MALTA and 6 843 19 681

Dr Andrew Azzopardi
Senior Lecturer, Department of
Youth and Community Studies
Faculty for Social Wellbeing,
University of Malta &
Broadcaster – Ghandi xi Nghid
www.andrewazzopardi.org