

Why Be Glorious?

I was in London recently and attended a performance of “Glorious”, a new play by Peter Quilter. Maureen Lipman plays the role of Florence Foster Jenkins, or Madame Jenkins as she called herself. Florence was a society lady in 1940s New York, and a singer of operatic arias. Like the bicycle riding monkey, the amazing thing about Florence was not that she sang well, for her singing was execrable, but rather than she sang at all, given how badly she did it.

Florence Jenkins’ dream was to be a diva. People who came to her performances often mocked and laughed, but they also admired her for pursuing her dream and daring to do something, even though she did it badly. Quilter finds Florence Jenkins noble and inspiring. She may not have been the best, because being best was simply beyond her, no matter how hard she tried, but she tried, regardless.

It takes a certain courage to be second best and to know it. “People may say I can’t sing,” said Florence, “but no one can ever say I didn’t sing.” Peter Quilter puts the word “glorious” into the mouths of his characters. Being glorious is singing when you can’t sing well. It’s living life as fully as you are able, despite the fact that what you are able to do doesn’t compare that well with the competition.

How often do we not sing, paint, dance, apply for a job, pursue a possible relationship, or even bake a cake, because we know we won’t do it very well? Being glorious is about having the courage to make a valiant attempt.

“If a thing is worth doing,” said Winston Churchill, “it is worth doing badly.”

Though I be ever so conscientious, I do not think I shall ever be perfect or even best at anything. I will not be the best son, brother, friend, or lover, nor even, alas, psychotherapist. Like Florence Jenkins, and probably (and I hate to be the one to break this to you), like you, I shall be one of life’s also-rans: second best, with luck, good enough, but sometimes only just. I cannot be the best: it is beyond my ability, but I can choose to be glorious.

I am resolved to have more courage in the next twelve months. I shall attempt more things that I know I shall do badly. Will you join me in being glorious this year?

© Adam May, MA (Hons), ADHP(NC), MNRHP, 2 Fron Heulog, Llanddaniel
Fab, Gaerwen, Anglesey, LL60 6EP. Tel. 01248 421015. e-mail:
therapy@adammay.co.uk.

Comments and feedback on this article are warmly welcomed.