

Let the Rivers Flow: Lived Experiences Panel with Tyler Huff

38:40

Tyler Huff: Hi everyone, my name is Tyler. I am very glad to be here today with you. I'm very sorry that I can't be in person- or can't- not even live online. I'm a teacher and I teach little ones so I can't really leave them along longer you know, ten seconds because they'll climb on stuff or take my pens or, shove it up their nose- they're little kids! So, I'm really glad to be here today as I said, because I think this is a topic that is often overlooked or kind of just pushed to the side or I think more cynically I think it's a topic that's not taken seriously and- and I think that those that should do not put weight on this topic to and it sucks because I think that stories that I'm sure you all are telling and like you'll hear from me are not taken seriously or just kind of brushed off. So, I'm really glad that this is taking place right now because I don't think- sorry, I think that it not only provides a real stable environment for that information that needs to be conveyed to be conveyed but I'll also say think it provides a stable and safe, and hopefully comfortable environment, for those who have these stories to tell. It gives them a place to tell their story and be taken seriously and I think that's really important, and I think it's too bad that I think that for some maybe, when they try and tell their story it's not taken seriously in other environments so I'm glad that this is being put on and I'm very, very fortunate and humbled that I'm able to be here today. So, like I said, my name is Tyler. I have Type 3 ADHD, which is both hyperactive and inattentive and I have generalized anxiety disorder- I don't like saying it's a disorder- I'm just a very anxious guy is what I say. I'm just an anxious person. I have a TBI- so I was actually hit in the head pretty hard at work a couple of years ago I got a really, really bad concussion and it really didn't do what normal concussions do. So, bear with me, I'm going to tell you the story that really pertains to how I feel about this topic and why I think it's important and we'll go on from there. So, I was an eighteen-year-old, first-year undergraduate student and I was living in residence at the time at the university and I was so taken aback by their experience. I think that- I don't want to mean the whole experience- but just being a first year at university is so exciting because you have no idea what's going on and you have no idea what to do. It's a brand new place, there's so many people around and so many diverse people around too! I grew up in a small town so going to a university where there was more people in one room than there was in the entire town I grew up in right? So, I really, really was fascinated and I took interest in this independence piece where there was all these people and all these things to do and I alone could make the decisions to do those things or not. It was quite a breaking free moment being first year university student. So, with that said, I got really, really involved with school. So yeah, I went to class, and I tried to learn a thing or two cause it costs like \$500 a course but, I joined student council. I was participating and putting on all of these activities and things for people to do and it was great. It was great and during that time I guess, maybe not so great thing is I experienced my very first adult

relationship and I experienced my very first adult breakup. It's weird because I guess it's hard to imagine what a relationship and what a breakup can do to you or do to who you are because I- we only dated- this individual and I- we only dated for a couple months and it was weird because I took the breakup ridiculously hard- like really, really hard. I really think in retrospect, I think I really put my cards down on the table and I took a leap of faith for that relationship- I was head over heels for that girl. So, and I- it was sad. It was just sad that it was over. Even and I think looking back on it, I think that's something actually destroyed- I'll say you know here for dramatic effect- destroyed the relationship because in the end, she left, and I spiraled into a crisis of existentialism. I didn't have a damn clue who I was. I was feeling all these emotions and these passionate emotions, but I never understood why. See, nothing made any sense, the world didn't make sense, it was so difficult for me to put rhyme to reason to put logic to emotion and it even more so, it was so difficult for me to understand how a two-month relationship could cause so much misery. You know what I mean? It- I kept playing it over in my head- over and over again and I think lots of people do that but for me it was like a constant- like I was watching a movie of my own misery in my head all the time right? It's like watching the Fault in Our Stars forever you know- Augustus, he still dies in the end- every time we watch it but we kind of- every time we think about it we hope he doesn't. That was sort of what it was like for me- in the end I kind of just kept thinking about it and wishing for a different ending. Or wishing that I could understand. So, I kept- I kept asking for closure, this kinda started playing with my head and I wanted to understand and so, trying to put reason to it all I was looking for closure I'd say why is this happen- why did this happen? What's wrong with me? What did I do- like I was you know- and it really kind of took over my purpose of being at university, which is tragic in itself but it did and until I guess, until words that start- that were used to describe me became 'harassing' and 'crazy.' I don't- I don't even know how to quantify that. I was so angry and sad and confused and here's that spoiler alert very, very anxious. Is that really who I am? That's the question I was always asking myself at that point is- it got so okay we broke up and there's this break up but then it was spiraling it's like this boulder that kept getting bigger going down this hill. So, at this point as this boulder was getting bigger it was like oh my goodness, am I someone who is crazy? Is this who I am? Is this why she doesn't want to be with me? Am I nuts? Am I psychotic? Is there something wrong with me in my head? Is all I do everyday- is it- do I just harass people all day? Do I wake up and I start going out and harassing people and throwing my coffee on them and-it was thoughts like that- almost those manic thoughts that kept going forever and ever and ever in my head and it was hard. See, I never wanted this to happen, I never even to this day I would never want people to think of me as somebody who's crazy or psychotic or [pause] you name it. Because of that I felt really guilty, I placed that blame on myself- it must be something I did or something I was doing to make them feel like that. That I was crazy or that I was psychotic or that I was nuts [pause] so, that's what I believed at the time, that's what I thought. So, I placed all of that blame on to me and I guess at the time too I never really had to cope with such an inner struggle before. I don't know if anybody else gets a dry mouth when they're talking but anyway. So, I

never coped with such an existential struggle before and I, at the age of eighteen, was really going through the hoops- I say rolling with the punches of trying to figure out who I am- my place in the world and who I want to be and how I want to be and um, sort of the type of circle I want to keep if that makes sense. Even now, I can't sit here and I can't tell you without feeling some guilt, I couldn't tell you that there's a truer and tried method of coping with existential crises or troubles or it- I don't know. I honestly have no idea. I'm grateful everyday that I am still here because I can't sit here and say 'this is how you get through it, this will make you feel better.' I don't think that's how that works. So, at the time, because I didn't know any coping methods and to be honest with you I- again, I don't think there's any tried and true method- I, the only thing that I thought might help and that was boxing a punching bag. Not because I wanted to hurt anybody or not because I wanted to you know, picture it as somebody and hit them or do whatever it was because of all these passion emotions I was talking about. I had such energy that- I say stimulation, not in a weird way, but I was just going 24/7, my mind was racing and busy it was buzzing. It was like having a bee in your ear you know, and I just needed a way to get that energy out and to sort of well, release it, I guess. Yeah, release that energy so, I went to this bag this punching bag at the gym that was attached- well not attached- it was on the same campus as the university, it wasn't attached, anyway doesn't matter. It was a heavy bag it was sand filled. It hung by a little chain at the top so, you literally hook it up every day and then it would swing back and forth so, as you're hitting it, you're pushing it, whatever you want to do with the bag it would swing back and then come forward again and I thought- this what I thought it would lessen the blow so it has somewhere to go with the force you're applying to it. I thought 'wow, this is a great way of getting all this energy out and maybe, maybe just releasing some of that anger and that confusion and when I say anger, I don't mean like I'm mad at anybody, I think I was more mad at myself more angry at myself because I can't carry the burden of this guilt with me every single day. I guess- to interject in my own story I think it was- it must you know, I think it's easy to say well, it must have been exhausting. Well, yeah it was exhausting but it was- you still had all this energy that wasn't going anywhere and so, I went to the bag every night for the most part and I'm not going to say I wanted to go it was actually that I needed to go. It was such a great release and a coping mechanism for me and given the type of bag it was- it was a heavy bag right- so it wasn't you know pushing a little blow up- the kids one that goes down and flops back up, it was a heavy bag. So, my hands would bleed every now and then, not cut open but the knuckles would bleed from hitting them and they would scab so, and then as you go again the scabs may break open and bleed again. So, this one particular night and I am gonna say it was a Sunday- that was when we had our student council meetings, if you recall I think I mentioned that I was on student council in the beginning- I think. I- so, I went to the punching bag, and I felt really good after so, and I went back- I had to go back to my council meeting- so, I didn't miss it. So, I guess somebody- sorry, two steps back I didn't have time to like shower and get cleaned up and you know take- put polysporin or whatever on my knuckles to, whatever. So, I just went straight to the council meeting I thought nothing of it. But someone in that meeting-

in a position of authority, saw my knuckles and instead of talking to me about it they put forth a formal accusation in their own meeting to like the boss and there was a lot of people there- I wasn't there. That accusation was 'Tyler is dangerous and he's a threat to others.' [Sighs], So, it's [sigh] I still think about it to be honest and it doesn't have as much emotional weight on me as it did at the time but I still think about it because just the saddest part of it all was that this accusation led to people that had never met me, who had never spoken to me, had never you know given me a chance, they had heard this accusation and almost became a rumor or an un- well, an unspoken truth but not true- I don't know, I'm sure you get the point. These people that had never met me heard this and was told about my insanity and unfortunately, they believe it so, I was living in residence and all these people were around and I felt like it was- I guess to use Shrek as an example- I felt like the ogre in the kingdom you know. It really is a damning accusation and it's one that took control of my life. I think it was my rock bottom to be honest because as I said earlier with that spiraling boulder that just keeps getting bigger, and bigger, and it got big and I just couldn't hold it up at the bottom of the hill and it just crushed me because at the time, I stopped eating. I lost fifty-five pounds, I was tiny. I stopped going to school to be honest, some days I slept because I was so tired, and it didn't matter what I did. I could sleep for however long and I'd still be exhausted, and it just seemed like life didn't matter anymore because I didn't have a purpose. Or I- and I wasn't given the chance so, really at that point it begs the question of why? Why am I here? What am I doing? Why should I be here? You know, and that's on top of and under that sort of umbrella question 'why?' and you know, philosophers will tell you well why not? But, my argument is well, it's such an umbrella shaped question in that all of your and all of my I guess in a sense where all my questions of 'am I dangerous? Am I crazy? Am I psychotic?' Are they- it's all under this why and it really, at the time like I said I lost fifty-five pounds and because I became afraid of my own existence because I didn't understand who I was. They must in my head I was thinking well, there must be something that makes them think that, right? I don't know. I think that every one has a- I guess to this day, sorry, two steps back- I think that everyone has an invisible backpack and in that invisible backpack, and this might seem like a cliché, but in that invisible backpack is your baggage and your fears and your anxieties and your barriers and sometimes, your backpack gets really, really heavy. It's hard to move. It's hard to carry forward. It's difficult, it's very, very difficult, because it's so easy to just become what they want you to become, right? I hit rock bottom and I became what they wanted me to become. I started doing everything I could just to prove them right. Why? I don't know. I don't know, but I did. It seemed at the time that in my rock bottom I was faced with an ultimatum, I guess. Come the end of the year it was that I could- you could- I'll say 'you' just meaning me, I don't know. You could either become what they want you to become, or you can become you. I think there was a choice that I had to make in the end, and I sought counselling. I got help and it did wonders I ended up being great- no, I don't want to say great- I ended up surviving, I'll say. I say because there was a choice of you could become what they want you to become or you can find out who you really are and who you want to be. That's a

decision that's not an easy decision to make by any means. Do I think it's that black and white? No, but it's the best analogy I've got in my situation because I don't- I think there was a point where I just had to accept that sometimes there is no reason- there isn't any rhyme to the reason, there isn't any logic to the emotion. It just didn't make much sense to me you know. So, that is my story and I'm still seven years later sitting here, telling this story now and it seems surreal because I at the time don't think that I was given a lot of grace to explain my side of the story. It feels- I don't know if anyone can relate but it definitely feels like I was on the defence of my own life if that makes sense so, it- you were damned if you do and damned if you didn't and that was it essentially. It didn't matter what I did. All that mattered was that I was dangerous, and I was a threat. So, to sort of go off of these questions that are- and I'm just going to pull them up so I- just so that I have them in front of me so I can stay on track um [pause] let's see here, okay. I think so, for the first little part here um, I sort of struggle I guess with Indigeneity, being Métis because it's- people don't really think I'm Métis because well, I'm pretty white. So much so that I actually applied to be an Indigenous programmer- what I mean like I put on events and things that like that is Indigenous focused and I was told when I went in to apply for it I couldn't because I wasn't Indigenous. Well, so I had to actually pull out my Métis card to say actually, I am. So, I struggle in that sense but in terms of disability and Indigeneity for me specifically, I think it's challenging because it seems that to me, you're either disabled or you're not. Or you're either Indigenous or not. It's- there is no current correlation between the two- I mean, I think there is but it seems the system is like there's these two boxes and you can check both of them but they're- you can't put them together. I think [pause] in fact I know, through my research that I was able to participate in through the university as I got older- I think and I know that Indigenous kids and people are more likely to be diagnosed with a behavioural I'll say disability, so you know and I reflected on myself actually when I heard that and I thought well, is that why everyone thought I was the way I was? Because I had ADHD even though nobody knew I had ADHD? I didn't even know I had ADHD at the time. Did I think- so, I really reflected on that at that time, and I think- I definitely think- I want to stay away from saying that disability affects Indigenous people more than it affects other people. Because I can't say for certain that it does, I don't know, and I don't want to make that claim because I don't have anything to substantiate with it. For me specifically, it's Indigenous and it's gender. So, it's the correlation between gender and Indigeneity that affected me in my story. There is an automatic assumption from my story- that in my story- that I was a dangerous individual because I was- I believe because I was male and because I was Métis. I don't think and I don't know but I choose to believe I guess- or I wonder- I'll say I wonder I often wonder if I was female or identified as female, would I have been treated with more grace in that time that I just told you about? So, I think- well, now that I'm talking about it I almost think that maybe it does affect Indigenous people differently and maybe it does affect them because as I said in the beginning this is a topic that's been so brushed aside and so chastised and just given no time of day that maybe it does affect them because maybe we just haven't given them the space and time to explain themselves or explain ourselves. Like I said that I

was always on the defense. No one said 'hey Tyler, what are you thinking right now? What are you feeling right now?' So, I guess there is and intersectional you know, identity of being Indigenous and disabled but I would argue that in my case there was also- there was also a correlation between both the latter and the former and gender on top of that. I realize that I really- I look white- but I just I'm just concerned I guess that there was a lot of assumptions made based on what I look like. Or, what I identify with. If that makes sense. Culturally supportive or safe services I think to me look- uh, let's two steps back- actually sorry, yes. Culturally safe, supportive spaces, to me are ones that- like this one- give credibility and understanding to those. I- it's tough um, [pause] it's tough I think when you're not taken seriously or you're shoved and you're put into this box you know and they, I think it's very easy to be looked at face value without actually digging into the why and the how of you and who you are. I think Indigenous worldviews I think really correlates to it and the way I look at it from my understanding of Métis culture- and by no means am I an expert- but I think that it's very panoramic. I sort of look at it as the past plus the present equals the future. I realize it's not that black and white but, it's I sort of identify with that because it ended up being- when I was going through those motions of figuring out who I was and the why and becoming me, I had to look at my past, looked at my present and now it's- I find today like I'm a teacher, I'm living my dream! Right? I'm getting goose bumps cause I'm doing what I always wanted to do and there's a point in my life, like the one I told you that I didn't think I'd make it. So, when I was looking at my past, my present it's now it's equalling my future. It's gotten me to where I wanted to be. Not saying that what happened is right by any means. I have a very different opinion of that now then when I was eighteen. But I think that culturally safe services take into account Indigenous worldviews. What that is? I can't say. I can only say what I understand based on my Métis culture and Métis heritage. I don't know what it would be like for other Indigenous peoples or groups or cultures or tribes or whatever have you. But for me, I think I look at it as a panoramic way of viewing life as your past and your present equals your future. I guess what I mean by that too is when I- the Métis we're very connected to certain animals and very connected and I guess I don't mean like spiritually with crystals and what not. I mean spiritually- my grandma and I, sometimes we have dreams, and we'll call each other and very oddly will have similar dreams I don't know. I don't know what that- again, I'm no you know but, I really think that it's the entire world that encompass that panoramic view of the entire world should be involved or taken into account with Indigenous services. I actually really think speaking with Elders is something that is truly helpful and truly amazing because it- the current system that's in place- this is what I argue- there's this big colossal gap between Indigenous worldviews or Indigenous ideas of disability or- I don't want to say Indigenous is this a complete- I'll say my idea of Indigenous disability I guess- there's this colossal gap of that and westernized medicine because westernized medicine does not include or take into account a human element. That human element is something we all have and that's our emotions. So, something that I really had to come to terms with and learn is that we all feel, we all have emotions and well yeah, I guess arguably it could be subjective to the individual then why are

services not directed on an individualised basis but based on a handbook like the DSM 5. Food for thought. I- it's tough cause this is not something that can be changed or done overnight by any means and I would argue that things like this are extremely, extremely helpful not only for my own mental health and well-being but I think for others who experience similar things. I always think and maybe this goes back into my viewpoint of my Métis heritage and saying I always think about the next guy. What's the next guy gonna have to go through? When I was hurt at work when I got my concussion I thought what about the next guy? What do we have to change because of the next guy- or person, sorry- goes through this, right? It's almost like a lifelong learner if that makes sense but not so much personal but what do we have to do for that next person? I think that that's a very healthy way for me in my own life to think about things and to think about conflict is okay I'm going through this so maybe I can help the next guy or next person that goes through this if that makes sense. I think with my panoramic analogy I'll say or my viewpoint on how I interpret the Métis culture looking at life I really think that's really what could help or make those spaces and communities more inclusive of all kinds of people and again, I don't wanna say like again, I don't wanna say disability or certain things affects this person more than this person because I just don't know that for sure. I can't say that for sure because I haven't been in everybody's shoes before. So, I don't know. I'm just speaking from my personal experiences and again like I, I think if we adopt this view of that someone's past and present doesn't necessarily decide who they become or decide who they are but it plays a part in. It seems their past and their present doesn't- or their past and their future it just doesn't matter. All that matters is this right now. Who are you right now? How do you answer that? I don't know. So, anyway that um, I'm sort of going on a spiel here. I really, I hope I did this justice that's really my goal here is to use my story to again, like I said what about the next person? I hope maybe somebody or some of you could relate to my story or maybe understand it. Again, I mean of all the guiding questions I like those cause I could talk for hours but, I think to encompass it all I think if we include this panoramic view of things saying well, their past and their present right and we look at the person as a person. Look at them as a human being instead of looking them as a case number of a diagnosis. My ADHD does not dictate who I am or sorry, does not dictate what I am. It's just a small accompaniment it's a small part of who I am. I accept that and I sort of wear it like armour because now nobody could ever use it against me. Because I understand now. So, when I really looked at that panoramic view and thinking of who I was and where I came from and my connection to my family, my friends, and others it really, really helped me understand me and accept who I am in my past, in my present, and in my future. So, thank you. Thank you all so, so much for giving me the opportunity to just speak today and tell you my opinions and my views and my experiences because it's not only gratifying but it's, it just is really humbling. I'm really, really almost fortunate now of what I went through because then I get to help somebody else and that's all there is to it. So, thank you. Thank you so much unfortunately, I'm not there right now to answer all of your questions but I just really hope that I did this project and I did this justice. So, thank you so much and I hope you have a wonderful time and please just

take it all in. Take it all in and takeaway something from this because it's so important.
Thank you.