

At birth, Mother called me *Travesty*. Travesty, a name meaning *disaster*. I could have given me a name which stood for something like great warrior, defender of the faith, or beautiful boy. She could have named me after somebody famous, but no, she called me Travesty. To Mother, I was a disaster. This was the world I entered. But, I should *not* have entered. Between you and me and the gatepost, I wasn't meant to arrive. I was an accident. A disastrous accident, a travesty.

Mother had her favourite people. Mind you, she changed them regularly. Her favourites were as changeable as the wind. I never reached the lofty heights of favouritism with Mother; I never reached any level of anything with her. I had set myself a *low* standard and failed to achieve it. I was the 'black lamb' of the family. Eventually, I grew up to become the 'black sheep' of the same family. I wear the title proudly, my badge of honour.

Twelve months after my birth, in Mother's beloved Baptist church, I was *christened* Travesty. In hindsight, I'm glad I was christened in a Baptist church by a *minister*. Knowing what I know now, it may have been a risky affair being christened anywhere else. Although I was only twelve months old, I still don't think I would have taken too kindly to being *touched* up by some dirty old *priest*. At least Baptist ministers have a healthy reputation for *not* being 'kiddie fiddlers'. I'm none too sure about them other mobs.

During the baptism, Mother asked the minister to hold my head under water for an hour or so. She wanted to make my christening more akin to a *sacrifice* to God. Thankfully, the minister refused.

I was at the beginning of my teenage years, thirteen, when I dropped out of school in grade four. I use the term 'dropped out' loosely, as it was more a case of being asked to leave. That, or be expelled.

'The boy is as thick as a tree, thick as a forest full of trees,' Mother would say. 'Damn disaster he is. Nothing good will come of him.'

Father was more understanding. He remarked I'd tried for a number of years to crack a *pass* level in grade four.

'Ten out ten for the effort, son.'

I found Father's comments positive and uplifting.

'Perhaps *learning* is not your forte in life,' he said.

My schoolteachers agreed. They couldn't see the sense of me learning either. From my perspective, I didn't care a hoot about some bloke Pythagoras running around bleating about his theorem. I'm betting he was a relative of that other bloke Euclidean. He did stuff with geometry. They both probably lived in a house looking like a three-sided right-angled triangle. Perhaps Hypotenuse lived with them?

Father thought it better if my *résumé* stated I had left school voluntarily, as opposed to being expelled. Hence he agreed with my leaving. You have to give credit where credit is due; they didn't come much smarter than my old man. No flies on him.

Mother was not a happy camper because my school career had come to an end. One of my aunties wasn't happy either. The woman did nothing but complain. I called her the *Whinging Aunt from Whining Hill*.

'Oh, the shame of it,' she would wail. 'How can it be, leaving the education system in grade four? People will talk about it, you know. I'll never be able to show my face in town again.'

Father believed the *Whinging Aunt from Whining Hill* was a certifiable loopy loopy control freak. He also thought she needed a good *root*.

'People who have good roots don't complain. You can tell! I've never complained in my life,' he would say. 'Remember, son, for later in life, always surround yourself with good roots. It's what keeps us men happy and contented and stops us from complaining. Whenever you need *solace*, *compassion* and *understanding* just go pull a good root. There's your solace, compassion and understanding, boy, right there.'

Later in life I understood what he meant, and what sound advice it was!

As payback for me dropping out of school, and to ensure I wouldn't have the entire

family fortune to myself when my parents became *dearly* departed, Mother adopted two others. What escaped Mother's attention was the family fortune she was trying to protect fitted nicely into a small tuna can.

Father didn't like the adopted ones. So much so, he never spoke to them.

Sometimes I heard him mutter, 'It is not possible people exist as stupid as those two. Fuck me; there isn't a brain cell between the pair of them, not one.'

My adopted brother became Mother's favourite. He could lift heavy weights, but that was all he could do. I called him *Speed* because he was so *quick* on the uptake. In reality, he wasn't. *Speed* was never accused of being the quickest cab off the rank.

My adopted sister was *not* gifted with any form of intelligence – whatsoever. She was as dumb as dog shit. I called her *Wind Between Ears*. I felt the name did her fair justice. She annoyed me so much my arse would bleed when she came near me. Other times, just the sound of her voice would send me to the toilet with the bleeding shits. If you were scrapping the bottom of a barrel of stupid people, she *wouldn't* be there. She's so stupid she couldn't even get a gig at the bottom of a barrel full of stupid people. If all the stupid people in the world held a party only for stupid people, *Wind Between Ears* *wouldn't* be invited on account of her superior stupidity. She was never accused of being the sharpest knife in the cutlery drawer. But, she did have a *unique* personality – one similar to a house brick.

Wind Between Ears often referred to Centrelink, the local unemployment office, as her little Happy Reservation. It was here on Fridays, she gathered with like-minded people to collect their social welfare payments. They would dance and yell whoop-whoops together, and then rush outside to buy cigarettes, track suit pants, and go to MacDonal'd's.

'How's good's this shit?' *Wind Between Ears* would say as she spun around the Centrelink floor on her stupid head attached to her stupid body. 'They gimme money for doing nuthfing, not a fing. This is the land of the free, orright. Free freaking handouts, man! Why would youse want to live anywheres else? Not me. I know which side of the road my bread is smeared with butter on.'

I'd throw rocks at her and she'd go tell on me. She'd sob in Mother's arms exaggerating the entire incident. At times, she became emotional because her unemployment benefits didn't last her long. Once, I tried to play the caring brother role. I took it upon myself to ease her pain, to console her.

I told her I knew of a way out of her misery. A place she could go to where she could get as many cigarettes, track suit pants, and big Macs as she wanted – all free. She broke into a burst of excitement as I slowly, but thoughtfully, suggested *suicide* to her. I explained it would end her suffering.

As *Wind Between Ears* thought about my kind suggestion, I solemnly added, 'You know I can get a rope, and you could use the tree out back.'

Three weeks later, *Wind Between Ears* cottoned on I was pulling the piss, when she caught me drawing a hangman's noose on her bedroom door. She told her obedient *Speed* to beat me up. He did everything she said. *Speed* ducked, weaved, threw punches, and finally broke the mirror. Dumb prick thought his reflection was me. With *Wind Between Ears* and *Speed*, Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution had failed. They had not evolved.

Who hated me the most? Depended on the day of the week, and who could blame me the most. They blamed me for everything. The war in Afghanistan, climate change, global warming, too little rain, too many floods. They blamed me for the government and for taxes. They even blamed me for 'Home and Away' being on TV. They all wanted me dead.

Speaking of blaming me, Mother blamed me for her having to get married. Early in her relationship with Father, they both threw caution to the wind and played doctors and nurses. You know the game? Similar to hide the sausage or letting the python out for run. Before premarital sex became par for the course, and having children out of wedlock became a norm of society, Mother and Father rattled one off, they did. I was born because Mother and Father failed to control their primal urges of mating. They failed to quell the flames of their passion, and most importantly, they failed to practise safe sex.

By the time the smoke had cleared from Mother and Father's heated, wild and crazy, screaming, sweating, pulsating, doing it this way, doing it that way, doing it any old way,

getting their rocks off, 'was it good for you' lovemaking, I was swimming towards the womb of life.

Father would have been pounding his chest, bragging how his magical flute hadn't missed a note, because it was so highly tuned. Mother would have been lying there with her skirt up over her head and her ankles in the air, thinking to herself, how the Hell did that happen?

At the same time Father would have been saying, 'Yeh, that's what I mean – a bit of old-fashioned solace, compassion and understanding.'

Mother learned two things that evening. The bench seats of an FJ Holden had the room for two people to stretch out, and whilst Father may be taller, you're all the same height lying down.

'I never even felt you,' said Mother to Father.

'Your dick shrinks when you're highly tuned,' replied Father. 'It's well known.'

'You serious?' said Mother. 'Wow, you must have been super highly tuned.'

Often, to fend off Mother's criticism, I'd remind her of this incident. I'd remind her I was born, because of what she and Father had done, hence my birth wasn't my fault, and therefore she should lavish gifts and goodwill upon me. Mother wouldn't have a bar of it.

Instead, she would say, 'No, no. it's your fault I got pregnant. You were the one who swam. You didn't have to, you know; you didn't have to swim.'

Father was different from Mother. What you saw is what you got. He was born during the Great Depression when there wasn't much of anything for anyone. This made him a man of few needs and wants. A noble tradition he *insisted* I follow whilst I lived at home. Father was originally a Catholic, but for reasons best known to him, he sacked the Catholic religion from his life and married my *then* pregnant mother in a Baptist Church. In case the Catholics misunderstood his message the first time, Father also became a Freemason. The Roman Catholic Church has long been an outspoken critic of Freemasonry; this suited Father. If the Catholics didn't like the Freemasons, then the Freemasons must be all right. Besides, Father never trusted a man who had never rattled one off, hence his distrust of Catholic priests.

'It's not right,' Father would say. 'It's not right at all. A man has to unravel his Johnston every now and again. Otherwise you get headaches. You know, play humpy humpy, trip the lights fantastic. A man who doesn't root and prefers to wear dresses is messed up in his head. He needs a good root to get it right.'

In my younger days, Mother made me read the Bible every day.

'You little tadpole impersonator, you. I'll learn you not to dart off to my womb,' she'd say. 'Now read and pray for forgiveness for your sins, you wicked boy.'

Before the Adopted Ones came into being, every Sunday morning Mother frogmarched me to church with her and Father. I had to sit in a pew with old people who smelled and dribbled through their oversized false teeth when they sang or spoke. I listened intently to the sermons in an attempt to understand the minister's weekly tale of enlightenment. Sermons, he had designed for all us sinners. Everyone was a sinner. How's that work? I didn't get it. The more the Church minister ridiculed sin, blamed the human race for sin, the more he mocked Hell, the more convinced I became I needed a piece of the *sin* action. The minister made sin sound like fun. I figured it had to be fashionable, as according to the minister, a lot of people were doing it.

I mentioned to the minister once, if Heaven and Hell were true, Hell would be my preferred destination. He enquired as to why. I answered him by saying, a party in Hell would have alcohol, girls, swearing, sex and sin, yeah, lots of sinning. Whereas, a party in Heaven would be what, a cup of tea and a lamington. The minister didn't see the same picture I was seeing.

As he walked away from me that morning shaking his head, I shouted, 'Why do you accept a belief system where you have to wait until you die to find out if it's true or not? It doesn't make sense, man. It's crazy thinking.'

Mother was trying to push me out the church doors as I continued with my wrath.

'Let's say you die, you end up facing the Pearly Gates, and some fat dude sitting on his butt with his legs crossed says to you, you screwed up man, Buddhism was the one. Now piss

off! You're buggered, get my drift?'

The minister and Mother failed to understand my point. She took me straight home and made me read the Bible again as punishment. Once, I attempted to explain to Mother I didn't *believe* religious leaders officiating on behalf of somebody's God; we're all that smart.

'Blasphemy!' she hollered. You're a blasphemous little bastard, you are!

I never believed that leaders of religion, no matter what religion they were, knew their subject matter – in their case, the Bible. That's why they have to read from it. They don't know it. Any numbskull can read from a book, and let's be honest, preaching is not like having a real job, like a technical job or a medical job. For those gigs you need many reference materials.

A person of the cloth uses one reference source *only*, a book, an old book. It's been around forever. The words in it haven't changed. The stories are the same. The characters in the stories haven't changed their names, and they're still doing the same stuff. The miracles are the same; no new ones added since the Bible was first written some 2,000 years ago. How hard is it to update the Bible, put out a new version as they do with other reference books? Put stuff in about what Jesus is doing now in Heaven? Is he working, or is still rattling on about his old man? Did God ever marry Mary, the mother of Jesus? Or do they live in sin? It, too, is fashionable these days. The Bible should also have an address in it for Heaven, so we can send birthday cards and gifts to Jesus. On Jesus's birthday, people give each other gifts. Why? Jesus gets nothing, no presents, no cards. That's very selfish. Religious people should be showing Jesus the love on his birthday. They should be singing him 'Happy Birthday', not giving each other gifts and saying 'Merry Christmas'. Jesus gets ripped off every year by a fat guy in a red and white suit, and it's not his birthday. It's the birthday of Jesus.

If religious leaders knew their subject matter better, they'd be able to *pass* onto their congregations the important messages the Bible offers.

For example, in 2 Kings 2:23-24 it states: 'Elisha left and headed towards Bethel. Along the way, some boys started to make fun of him by shouting, "Go away, baldy! Get out of here!" Elisha turned around and stared at the boys. Then he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Straight away two bears ran out of the woods and *ripped* forty-two of the boys to pieces!'

The message from this piece of scripture is simple enough to understand. Don't take the piss out of bald men; if you do, the bears will get you. This is the information the community needs to know. It makes sense; it's a good safety message. As God's preachers *failed* to pass on safety messages such as this to their congregations, people are still taking the piss out of bald men, and therefore, bears are still running about killing people.

I was fourteen, a recent school dropout, when I had a change of heart about my church attendance. I began to look forward to my weekly church sessions. By then, I knew enough of the Biblical shenanigans to run rings around the minister. It was fun watching him squirm as he tried to counter the logical arguments of a young teenager.

'Did you know,' I said to him once, 'if you repeated out loud every word Jesus is alleged to have spoken in the New Testament, it would take you two hours. That's it; that was the life of Jesus; you can tell it in two hours. Yet, you've been telling stories here every week, for how long? Your sermons go for an hour. You've gotta be making stuff up, man. Jesus didn't have that much to say. Two hours' worth. That's it, a done deal in two hours. What gives with you?'

The minister half-smiled at me and tried to talk to other worshippers.

I continued. 'Not only that, Jesus spoke in parables. Every parable he spoke in the *New Testament*, every one of them, was previously mentioned in the *Old Testament* – that's plagiarism, is it not?'

The minister was now outside the church trying to get away from me.

I let rip. 'The money donated by way of the collection plate is an interesting affair, isn't it? The donations are cash transactions, right? No receipts are issued, unaudited dollars, correct? The one person who knows where the money goes is you, huh? Who checks you?'

I kept following him. 'The Biblical authors were great, weren't they? We must praise

them for sharing with us their limitless, vivid imagination in the ancient art of storytelling. The most repeated story from the Bible, the story used more than any other story to indoctrinate children, is the Ten Commandments. According to scripture, God summons Moses to go to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Exodus 19:18 tells us, God arrived in a flaming bush to the summit of Mount Sinai.'

Question, Mr. Minister Man. Why would God arrive in a flaming fire?'

'What are you on about this time, Travesty?' he asked.

'If you're God,' I answered, 'wouldn't you just rock up and say, "Hey Moses, like man, I'm God; crack open a bottle of good red and let's talk about your behaviour? From where I sit, it doesn't look too good down here. I got a few rules for you, ten really good ones. Grab a rock and some slate pens." That's what God would do. He wouldn't send an old man climbing up to the top of a mountain looking for a flaming bush.'

And off ran the minister. Beaten by logic, brought down by fact.

I knew I was walking a thin line with the church before they expelled me. Yes, the bloody Baptists expelled me. I had a bad attitude towards God and his boy. The telling blow which tipped the bucket in favour of my expulsion was when I told a bunch of Sunday school kids that if they had their bags packed for the Second Coming, best they unpack; it isn't going to happen. I put my case forward as gently as I could, understanding the tender and vulnerable age of the young kiddies.

I said, 'After what we did to Jesus the last time he was here, do you really think he's considering coming back? There ended up being nails and stuff all over the place, bits of wood as well. Lots of crying too. We put him up on a Cross, left him hanging there, screaming his tits off in pain because of the nails we hammered into his hands and his feet. Blood and shit was all over the place. The Romans were laughing at him. One of them stuck a sword into his side. Come on kids, do you think Jesus is going to forgive us for that one? No way. He's probably scared of us. Hence, no Second Coming, and besides, based on the evidence I've seen, there hasn't *even* been a First Coming! It's all crap.'

The kiddies' little faces looked up at me and started to crumble as I told them, 'If Jesus is true, then I'm betting he *doesn't* love us; instead, I'm betting he hates us. We even made him carry his own big heavy Cross up the hill. And he was a king. Jesus wants us all dead, not in Heaven for eternal life with him. I'm telling you, Jesus has had a gutful of us.'

The little people were beside themselves with terror as I mentioned the pain Jesus would have been in when some flog slammed a Crown of Thorns on his head.

'Jesus is probably still carrying the scars on his forehead! Every time he looks in mirror he curses us.'

More importantly, as religious leaders do not understand the Bible, they've missed the real message Jesus was trying to tell us about his death.

'Don't you little snot gobblers go believing all this hogwash about Jesus dying on the Cross for the sins of mankind. That's not true. The message Jesus wanted us to understand from his death was that believing in God can be a painful experience. Sometimes you have to walk up hills carrying heavy shit. People can even die on a Cross from following God. Therefore, follow God at your own peril.'

The little joys of wonderment began screaming in fright with tears running down their faces and little bits of snot coming out their noses; a few did poo-poo in their pants. Parents heard their anguished cries and rushed over to shepherd their little lambs out of harm's way, right at the exact moment I said, 'And what is Christianity exactly? One woman has an affair, and every religious person in the world ignores it, and then quotes crap like "Thou shall not commit adultery". You dummies, religion started because of adultery. Get it together. And don't go taking the piss out of bald men; otherwise the bears will gobble up your sorry arses.'

I became the first person since Judas Iscariot (he stitched up Jesus at the Last Supper) to be expelled from a Baptist Church. This greatly embarrassed my mother. She never got over it.

'How could you do this to me?' moaned my wailing mother of the Baptist faith. 'I'll never be able to show my face around town again.'

Mother would rant, rage and call me a heathen as she made many phone calls to many people to see if they felt sorry for her because of my actions. Regularly, the *Whinging Aunt from Whining Hill* would appear with the 'feel sorry for me train'. On Mother would get, and off they'd go, whinging and whining and complaining into the distance. Toot toot!

I said to Mother, 'I don't understand why people put money into the collection plate every week; it's a con. They must be *stupid*.'

Mother snapped back, 'I put money in the collection plate every week.'

Sometimes life is more joyous if we say nothing. I smiled and let her comment pass.

Let Us Pray

Oh Lordy, oh Lordy,

I don't get this religion thing, mate

Like if you're true

Give me a hint

Which religion are you?

Amen

The Prophecies of Chapter One

- If Jesus does return, remind him the Romans did him in; no sense in anyone else taking the rap.
- Do not read the Bible to young children. It has scary bits in it.
- Do not upset bald men unless you're wearing a bear-protective suit.
- If you are in the woods and you happen to see a bald man in a bear-protective suit, keep your wits about you.
- The next time you go to church, take your own plate and ask for a donation.
- Bald men in the woods should wear hats and put sunscreen on their heads.
- If you're enjoying nature by walking in the mountains and you see a bush on fire, trust me, it isn't God. Do the right thing, put it out or call the Fire Brigade.
- Just to be sure, before you extinguish the fire, you could ask the bush if it is God. If God is true, you probably don't want to piss him off with a burst of cold water.
- Stupid people are put on Earth to help entertain the rest of us.
- Thank God for stupid people.