

## Chapter 6

### I Die

*as though one might simply step off the jetty...*

The Christmas season was always a great excuse to live it up, and although I was thoroughly out of sync with the world, I threw myself into the need to party with my usual panache. After a brief two-month spell playing bass with a young (*new wave - aargh!*) band from Elgin called Hustler<sup>1</sup>, I was no longer hampered socially by having to play - which freed up my evenings for that which I did best.

The thing I remember was sitting insulated and bombarded by music in a spaced out haze of THC in the Seafield disco, drinking Sweetheart Stout, staring mesmerised into the coloured lights and *thinking*.

Thinking. That was really all I wanted to do. I was on a quest and it had become an urgent quest - the quest for *meaning*.

Monty Python did a film called 'The Meaning Of Life'. Now - don't get me wrong - I love Monty Python, but there seems to me to be a certain fatalistic acceptance coming through that film (and I suppose everything that they did, if you think about it) that life is purposeless, random and devoid of any underlying meaning. A great many people

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<sup>1</sup> They were eighteen, I was twenty one. Already I was beginning to feel like a musical old relic.

subscribe to that view, but to me such people had just given up looking. Somehow I could never accept that. To me there *had* to be a reason for everything being the way it was.

I mean, if people say it's not *right* that people are starving in Africa, *why* is it not right? What difference can it possibly make? If life has no undergirding reason and guiding purpose, and is simply an ongoing process of *survival-of-the-fittest* evolution as most people seem happy to believe, then what can possibly be *wrong* about it? Can you think of a *reason* why its not right? Lions kill antelope, they even kill baby antelope. We may feel sorry for the antelope, but do we declare that it's not *right*? No, we say its natural. Why then do we lock up a young man - poor, desperate and down on his luck - for mugging an old lady? Surely he's just a 'lion' with an 'antelope'. But we say that he has done something *wrong*. We call him an *offender*.

Offender against whom, or what? Against the old lady? Yes. Against society? Probably. Against some 'higher moral code'? Possibly. Against **God**? *Whoa there!!!*

If the random evolutionist<sup>1</sup> suggests that this universal human awareness of the existence of absolute right and wrong is simply evidence that we are all evolving into some raised state of awareness and perfection that has somehow grown up out of the dog-eat-dog Darwinist heritage of our animal roots, does it follow that this higher

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. reductionist/atheist who buys the idea that we are just a bunch of chemicals.

state of social and (dare I say it) moral awareness is the ultimate goal and end of *all* evolution? That one day, not only will all wars cease and locksmiths go out of business, but even lions will possess the intellect and social conscience to see the error of their ways and stop being downright nasty to anything they fancy for dinner? To begin *loving vegetables*?<sup>1</sup>

People have a deep sense of right and wrong, and they do sense that it is somehow universal and absolute<sup>2</sup>. The tabloids thrive on it - although not by appealing to an ideal of perfection to which none of us can ever match up (as does the Bible, for instance), but instead by using a kind of ‘comparison morality’ by which each of us can be bolstered up daily by the thought ‘*I would never stoop to that*’ and the unvoiced conclusion ‘*I am therefore better than that guy*’<sup>3</sup>. A kind of palatable dilution of something that’s simply too strong for most of us - man judging man by the standards of man.

It sells papers, it’s very, very popular, but does it answer the big questions? And will it get us into heaven? Everybody is hoping so - *if* there’s a heaven. Listen, if there is a heaven, then there’s probably also

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<sup>1</sup> Ah, now... here we are assuming that vegetables do not feel pain. But is it really okay to torture and boil alive the poor vegetables simply because they cannot make a sound, far less fight back? Just because they don’t have a nervous system, does it mean they don’t have *feelings*? Who decides whether the vegetarian is right? Who decides whether the abortionist is right? *Who decides??*

<sup>2</sup> As opposed to relative and *whatever-is-right-for-you* as seems to be the incoming post-modern belief/cop-out.

<sup>3</sup> The Bible has a name for this: self-righteousness. Apparently it is like filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6)

a *hell*, (because the same book that told us about the one also told us about the other) and if there is and its unpleasant and you go there you won't ever, ever, ever get out. So, its important. Please think long on it...

Now do you see why I was desperate to find the meaning of life?

I hope you are too.

Unfortunately, sitting in the Seafield disco, staring at the wall, sipping Sweetheart Stout, and realising that all this stuff is important, didn't supply me with a deep inner sense of satisfaction at having arrived. Just because you know you're on a camel doesn't mean you're out of the Sahara.

All around was sinking sand... and then I met Phil.

I met Phil in the Fife Arms in Banff - one of our hang-outs and a great place to play pool. He was a friend of a friend and he had moved up from London a few months previous to live in a kind of semi-commune type situation whilst renovating an old country mansion near Macduff. He walked in one night looking like a miniature dark messiah - a 5'5" Jesus with long black hair and beard - the double of Ian Anderson of *Jethro Tull* but without the flute! Although he was 29 and

I was 21 we clicked right away. To me he seemed old, mature, very wise and full of knowledge.

As January 1979 hove into view, in the natural course of things I found myself in Phil's company a couple of nights just doing what we always did after the pub shut - sitting up, smoking dope and headbanging (i.e. discussing the big picture, not pretending to be at a Status Quo concert). That was the only thing I wanted to do... headbang. I was still no nearer an answer to my questions but my conviction that such an answer existed had totally outstripped my understanding. As we mulled things over and thrashed things through it became clear that my understanding would just have to catch up - fast.

That was where Phil dovetailed neatly into my world. Starved as I was of fresh inspiration from exhausted wellsprings, Phil poured new things into my mind. He helped me look at the same old things in a fresh light. Apart from anything else he seemed to know the Bible, which I certainly didn't. He could quote from it and referred to it often, usually the words of Jesus himself. I was knocked out by this and it seemed to lend tremendous weight to Phil's (and my) arguments. For the first time I felt that we were getting somewhere. I became excited, then disappointed, then excited again on an intellectual/spiritual roller coaster ride. The structures we built were demolished then rebuilt, then demolished again, but each new modification appeared to fine tune the overall design as we narrowed in on the prize.

When my four days off at New Year were ended, we returned to Fochabers. Phil came with us. He never went home.

Phil became as obsessed with the quest as I was, indeed more so. Work turned into a massive inconvenience to me as I passed the quiet days of early January sitting in the backshop, pondering, with the weight of the world on my shoulders. I longed to set off home at five o'clock with the strains of The Isley Brothers and Minnie Riperton's fabulous album *Adventures in Paradise* to carry me there.

There was a buzz about the old mushroom house in Fochabers. I no longer felt alienated. I felt at home. The life I was now leading was three million miles from where my folks were at - and I kept up the pretence - but I was now enjoying every minute of it because I felt we were getting somewhere! I was committed...100%. To what? I didn't yet know, but I knew I was, and the point of no return had been reached and the seesaw had tipped. The sheer magnitude of the importance of what we were doing was the only thing that mattered any more, and all four of us were totally committed.

We would all gather round the open hearth, more often than not as the inner three disciples keenly absorbing the teachings of their master. But as the days and nights passed, Phil's countenance began to change. He would sit cross-legged, rocking serenely back and forth, staring with a look of raw intensity into space or into the fire, seeing only the flickering reflection of his own thoughts. Sometimes he would hear what we said, sometimes he wouldn't, occasionally he would pick

up on something somebody said as though it were a missing piece of the jigsaw - the *next* piece - and he would run with it, carrying forward the momentum and direction of our quest into ever more promising realms.

Although Phil began to look less and less like Jesus and more like Rasputin the mad monk, we never noticed. We only saw the thoughts.

So, what of the thoughts? I've talked much about the atmosphere of the discussion and less about its substance. Well, part of the reason for that is that it was ever-changing and very difficult to pin down, and to be honest after twenty six years not that easy to remember!

I'll try...

I had taken a book out of the local library. It was the story of the Findhorn Foundation. Anyone familiar with *New Age* thinking may well have heard of it. We are talking about 1979 here and it was in its early days, but I believe it is now quite a big concern, and a world famous centre of pilgrimage for many who seek enlightenment through the various philosophies and disciplines that form what has come to be known as the *New Age Movement*.

By the way, let me say at this point that none of us had ever visited the Findhorn Foundation and nothing in this book claims to represent their beliefs or practices in any way, merely our perceptions of them.

Anyway, the book talked about various miraculous occurrences that were said to have taken place there, mainly to do with the growing of plants, and as I recall (and I could be wrong) the appearance of fairies<sup>1</sup>. This, coupled with the proximity of Findhorn (about 25 miles the other side of Elgin) led us to believe that there was something of great significance going on in the north east of Scotland. Now, because of Phil's gatling-gun approach to the life and words of Jesus Christ and the Bible generally, we began to observe a correspondence between the way that Christ appeared in Israel - to change the world almost two millennia before - and what was happening among us!!!

Phil also talked about Hindu belief (about which I knew very little) and introduced reincarnation into the melting pot. Various Hindu gods were mentioned, with their supposed characteristics, and also concepts of nirvana<sup>2</sup>, nothingness as the fusing of opposites, the universe being out of balance and out of sync, with worldwide suffering and evil as the result. It was a short step from here (remembering the marijuana haze) to the apocalyptic realization that what was coming to

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<sup>1</sup> Or faeries, as they now prefer to be spelt.

<sup>2</sup> And I don't mean the band.



pass amongst us could have something to do with the second coming of Christ, as predicted by Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Heavy, or what?

I know that most, if not all of this must come across as ridiculous and far-fetched nonsense, and of course - in retrospect - that's what it was. But what was happening in our experience was very, very powerful because it was actually a form of spiritual deception, aided and abetted by drugs, but driven along by living and invisible spiritual forces belonging to what the Bible frequently refers to as the kingdom of darkness - of which we had absolutely no knowledge - acting on all our imaginations and made all the more potent by the one accord we seemed to share. And then Gordon freaked out.

I came home on Friday night (12-1-79) to be informed that the two of them had been in the living room together and had both seen the god, *Pan!*

Apparently what had happened was that, whilst they had both seen Pan, he had appeared very differently to each of them. To Joe - a happy-go-lucky kind of guy who was never really phased by anything - Pan had appeared about twelve inches tall, complete with pipes and hooves and dancing along the back of the settee! He claimed to have had a fairly entertaining conversation with him before he vanished.

Conversely, to Gordon - who was an extremely serious and intense sort of bloke given to reading *Aldous Huxley* and *Michael Moorcock* and listening to *Frank Zappa* - Pan had appeared ten feet tall and a bit of a mean ogre! Poor guy had a bad experience, hightailed it home to his folks and was never seen again (till Sunday).

But hey, its an ill wind - I got my chair back!

That final week at Fochabers was filled with mounting excitement and anticipation. Each day and each night brought more of a sense that we were on the brink of something big. It was not that hard for me to believe that Phil was in some way a kind of Christ-figure. I had never met anyone like him. Probably not many people have!

On one occasion, Phil was up with me at the shop. He was sitting through the back and there were quite a few folks in looking at records. Two lads around my own age walked past the counter and as they did I noticed that one of them was wearing a large wooden cross with words on it that read *Jesus is Alive*. I leaned across and said to them, “Do you believe that?” to which they replied, “Yes”. I was seriously considering inviting them through the back to meet Him (believing as I did that Phil was in some way the living embodiment of Christ) but they moved on.

I know now they would have put me straight<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Gospel of Matthew 24:23-27!!!

But the revelation was yet to deepen and widen, involving me in a far more sinister role.

One thing that happened to me that week has never left me. To this day I remember it as clearly as the day it occurred, and as an experience it was in a different league from most of what was happening.

I was listening to Robin Trower's album, 'Caravan to Midnight' unusually loud in the shop. As I stood at the counter between the wall-mounted stereo speakers, the words of the song 'I'm Out To Get You' seemed to project from the music, hanging, almost shimmering in the air. It was as though they were being directed at me, spoken to me, from somewhere deeper and farther beyond the brilliant voice of the late Jimmy Dewar. Here they are:

"I'm out to get you, create a disturbance in your mind,  
I've been sent to select you, from another place and time,  
It's gonna be something good, you better not hesitate,  
For the first time in your life, you can celebrate.

Close your eyes, count to ten,  
Make a wish and we'll be there,  
Turn around and maybe then,

Your life can start again.”

These would ultimately prove to have been prophetic words. But for the moment there was serious work to be done...

Each night I rushed home. Each night the vision intensified until by the Thursday night of the third week in January, all our strivings came to an end. For Phil and I, at long last an apocalyptic jigsaw had been pieced together that made sense of everything.

Finally I had a reason *why*. Finally I understood why I had been born and what was really going on in that little mushroom house in Fochabers...

It went something like this:

We believed that a spanner had been thrown into the workings of the universe. Somewhere way back in the dim and distant past an event had taken place in paradise to throw everything off balance, like a seesaw or a scales tipping. Because of mankind's darkened understanding this event had been communicated to us figuratively through the biblical story of Adam and Eve by a deeply involved higher being or benign stabilising force which we associated with Rama, whom we understood to be the supreme Hindu god, and yet somehow he was depersonalised - we saw him rather as a kind of vibrant force that binds everything together, from atoms to galaxies.

So, paradise had been lost. It had long ago given way to what we perceive and experience as evil and suffering, with all the insecurity and fear that pervades this sad and difficult world in which we live. But the chief area which was out of balance was the natural relationship between man and woman - between men and women everywhere - and ever since.

Now, this is where it gets scary.

It was Eve who first ate the apple, not Adam. And when she did, and the serpent said, “You will become like God,” she became like God<sup>1</sup>. She did not *become* God, but she became *like* God. As we interpreted it, Eve (and by implication every female human that has ever lived) was from that moment endowed with god-like power and status, having perfect inter-telepathic communication (known vaguely to men as intuition), and even a spiritual form with the power to give the impression to men of an existence that is no more than a physical illusion, to keep up a façade and play out a role with the common aim among female-kind of perpetrating a gigantic cosmic deception, whilst they enjoyed a kind of gleeful Mt. Olympus-style game of slavery and complete domination of the entire male gender!<sup>2</sup>

And what of poor old Adam? Well, the scales had tipped and he was the one that was *down*. The nature of the imbalance in the cosmos was such that, to the extent to which Eve was now glorified, so Adam’s

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<sup>1</sup> It never occurred to us he might have been lying!

<sup>2</sup> Its the conspiracy theory to end all conspiracy theories.

life was a total bummer - and he was thereby doomed to scrape a meagre existence out of the squalor and ignorance that was now his lot, and - again by implication - the sad lot of every single man and boy that has ever lived since. And so we concluded that women were the callous, self-obsessed oppressors of men everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

*The enemy.*

But this situation was not to be allowed to continue forever because, just as nature has a way of always bouncing back and restoring itself after a natural disaster, even so the supreme benign power was constantly outworking a definite purpose and plan to bring about restoration. And all the world's religions and sacred texts which spoke of heaven, nirvana, utopia or paradise were just tiny cracks in a blackened window where the sunshine of life-giving truth was somehow able to shine through, releasing into the world of men (but not women) the vague hope of ultimate salvation - a full and complete restoration of *balance*.

So how was this epoch making event to be achieved? Well, sadly, that's where we came in.

To a certain extent, some of what has gone before may have a microscopic ring of truth about it - not so much the bit about women<sup>2</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Some of course are, but they don't have a monopoly on it.

<sup>2</sup> Unless of course you are married (joking! joking!)

more the fall into degradation and ultimate hope of restoration. *But*, the next bit definitely has not. Try as I might, I cannot make this sound in any way intellectually respectable! Its just *codswallop par excellence*.

Here goes anyway:

Jesus Christ had appeared in history as the saviour, prophesying that at the time of his Second Coming all things would be restored to their original, natural state of paradise. He had then allowed himself to be put to death on the cross, drawing the sting of evil [*actually, so far so good. However... and welcome to the planet Splonk...*] at this point, in order to remain untraceable by the nasty conniving female Amazon race, Christ somehow divided himself in two, and was doubly reincarnated - yes, reincarnated<sup>1</sup> - as a few humble blades of grass or amoebas or something, in which guise he was no longer aware of who he was (because if he had known, the women would have known). This process continued for nigh on two millennia, with each successive reincarnation being a step up the ladder of complexity of the flora and fauna of the world until eventually - via trees, insects, birds, reptiles, mammals and primates - the two 'halves' would finally one day meet up as human beings, struggle through to the point of realisation of who they were, with all the significance and implications of that revelation. They would then sort of *be* the Second Coming and set about restoring

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<sup>1</sup> A tiny detail somehow left out of the Bible.

the balance of all things by telling (suddenly receptive) men everywhere the truth.

And, of course... who were that soldiers but me and Phil.

Now, maybe it all sounds crazy<sup>1</sup>, but this cobbled together hybrid religio-philosophical mishmash was all we had, and I had to make a decision. It was easy for Phil, he had no ties, no commitments, but I had. He was totally focussed, obsessed. He was firing on all cylinders plus a few he never knew he had. But I had to make a *decision*. Was I committed? Because if I was, then everything had to go. I considered the road I had come, and I knew what I had to do.

If you have never actually discovered yourself to be the saviour of the world, it will probably be virtually impossible for you to fully appreciate the pressure I was under. I mean, I had searched desperately for the truth, partly to escape the pressure of the responsibilities I had assumed such as the job and the mortgage, but now the eternal future of creation and the human race was resting on me! I had certainly gotten more than I bargained for.

We were in a sense the firstfruits of the new world, the new universe - the true pioneers of the *new age*. Phil and I - so long as we held firmly to the vision - had broken the spell. All we had to do (and

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<sup>1</sup> Maybe?!



we had to do it for the sake of all men everywhere, and remember this was the cosmos' one chance) was to be brave, and the vision would spread. The new life of emancipation from bondage to the domination of womankind would now begin to work like yeast outward through the dough, beginning with us!

Please don't think that we must have been immensely arrogant to assume for ourselves such a role of cosmic significance. It was not that we particularly wanted to consider ourselves special, it was just how it seemed to pan out<sup>1</sup>. The feeling, I can assure you, was not one of smug self-importance at our new-found status, but rather of *fear*, and a crushing weight on our shoulders - literally the weight of the world.

But why did I say, be brave?

Well, guess who was aware of our every move... *and not very pleased about it* *at*  
*all?* That's right... the Ladies.

We were now being watched. I was assured by Phil that we were marked men - destined to be intimidated and harassed by every woman we would meet, and especially by those whom we knew, or to whom we were closest, whose merciless responsibility to stop us would be greatest. The reason for this was of course that their time had come.

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<sup>1</sup> If you'll forgive the pun.

Their number was up and there was not a single thing they could do about it. This would make them furious - and desperate - and because of the extent to which they were all immersed in deception and evil, they would stop at *nothing* in their combined attempts to divert us from our course.

*That* was why we had to be brave!

Unfortunately for me - and very soon for my parents - Phil was convinced that the only way we could defend ourselves against such an onslaught was through *hate*. His idea was that in the company of women it was absolutely critical that we maintain an attitude of vehement and intense hatred as a male stonewall defence against sly and charming feminine deception and emotional blackmail.

Of all the events that happened that weekend, this completely uncalled-for hate fixation is probably the thing that I have regretted the most, because at 5pm on the dark evening of Thursday the 18th January 1979, I set out with Phil for Macduff. Leaving him in the car I went in to see my parents, and proceeded to renounce my attachment to the things of this world. I renounced my mortgage, and I renounced my job, throwing the shop keys down in front of them. I stared in worked-up hatred at my mother as I pleaded with my father not to succumb to her 'false' and 'disingenuous' show of emotion.

I can't begin to imagine how painful this must have been for my folks. To them it came from nowhere - a complete bolt from the blue.

What a terrible shock it must have been for them to see me this way. I turned and walked out the door, roaring off down Duff Street in my car<sup>1</sup>.

The time for theorising was over. Now was the time for *action* - and I was up for it.

The first thing I attempted was a ‘reality check.’ Let me explain...

A major aspect of our thinking up to this point was the notion that the whole world as we experience it is a complete figment of our imagination - or should I say *my* imagination, as everything and everyone (including Phil who came up with the idea) owed their continuing existence to my continuing to make them up. By faith in the reality of things I perpetrate my life as an ongoing panoramic illusion in which I play centre stage. Although I am no expert, I believe this concept may be rooted in Hinduism (failing that ‘Phil-ism’), with nirvana - or nothingness - as the ultimate goal of every human being, all destined as we are to be reincarnated over and over again until we finally realise - or attain to - this goal. Finally we find peace for our troubled souls in complete self-annihilation.

But the great flaw in this philosophy has to be the goodness in life... meaningful relationships, fulfilling experiences, pleasurable

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<sup>1</sup> Which, interestingly, I hadn’t renounced.

pastimes, music, the sound of the birds, the smell of the flowers and all the awesomely beautiful sights that make us want to stand and stare forever. These, of course, must all be sacrificed. But when your troubles far outweigh your joys, release must be sought at any cost, to the point where all the good things just seem like tantalisingly wicked stumbling blocks placed there to tempt you back. To the ‘untouchables’ of India, such temptations may not have seemed so very great.

And so came the test...

I drove the car straight across a roundabout and into an illuminated yellow and white traffic bollard. I drove straight over it and continued on my way. I got much more of a shock than I expected actually. The sound of crunching plastic was incredibly loud as it reverberated through my little dark green Morris Marina, quite freaking out my carload of passengers.

But the biggest shock for me was the fact that it was there at all. You see there ought not to have been any crunching, because I can assure you I fully believed the bollard to have no physical existence! Fortunately I believed the *car* was there or we would all have been requiring a change of jeans, but my experiment in ‘selective beliefism’ turned out to be a resounding flop... *or did it?*

I stopped the car well away from the crime scene and got out to inspect the damage, and there it was: nothing. Absolutely no damage to the car whatsoever. A miracle! I was intoxicated by my success that (in spite of the deceptively physical-like sound effects) the bollard had

in fact not exerted any physical influence on the car because I - even I - had succeeded in believing it was an *illusion!*

For the time being this served to bolster up my attempts at forging some workable breakthrough philosophy worthy of the act of chucking in my whole life for, as I had just done.

A couple of things perhaps need to be said here: in 1979, the car manufacturers - although they had been aware of the tremendous benefit to the motor trade of rust for at least a decade and a half (Vauxhall in the 60's and Datsun in the 70's did some ground-breaking work in this area) - hadn't quite yet twigged on to the use of plastic and fibre glass as major components in vehicle body manufacture. This simple fact more or less covers the aforesaid miracle, as was confirmed the next day by the presence of tiny but telltale streaks of yellow paint on the bodywork under the heavy steel bumper!!!

At this point I somehow lost Phil and the carload - it was probably just me being the taxi again. Either that or they were experiencing niggling little doubts about my driving. I think Phil asked to be dropped off at the Fife or somewhere. Anyhow, I met in with Huw (pronounced Hugh) and we set off together in the car.

Huw was a very close mate (he was the one who had first rented the cottage) and we had gone on to become lifelong friends. A

Welshman with an *are-you-going-to-San-Francisco* accent (if you can imagine that), he was into all the same things that the rest of us were - in many ways more so, being four years my senior.

Although it would probably be wildly inaccurate to describe Huw as the most stable of characters (as I'm sure he would be the first to admit), he definitely had a stabilising effect on me that night - the effect I had on him is another story! Although Huw got pretty much caught up into the whole trip that was going down<sup>1</sup>, he could clearly see that I was wired out on this hate thing. He talked me out of it, wisely rationalising that if it was the case that a new age of restoration was being ushered in, then there was no more place for hatred. Love, forgiveness and a generally more peaceful and laid back enjoyment of the journey was called for. In the absence of Phil's intense, *everything's-a-complete-freakout* influence, it was easy for me to make the transition. The hate thing never sat with me anyway, and love (or at least trying to be nice to people) was much more my style.

I relaxed.

I started to become infused with a sense of awe and wonder at what was happening, overwhelmed by feelings of joy and happiness at all the possibilities that were opening up. We talked things over. As we stood outside the car, leaning over the railings and watching the calm, gently lapping waves at the harbour front in Macduff, we spoke

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<sup>1</sup> Frisco here I come!

about faith. We talked about how physical and worldly limitations could be overcome simply by the power of belief without doubt.

By way of illustration we walked down the four foot wide flight of concrete steps that led to the water. The sea happened to be exactly level with the flat concrete jetty at the bottom and looked for all the world as though one might simply step off the jetty and walk out on to it. We talked about Jesus, how he had walked on water<sup>1</sup>, and I can tell you I was just *that* away from sallying forth, but... I doubted, and worse, I *knew* that I doubted. I tried not to, but if you've ever tried *not* to doubt you'll know I was on to a loser. A plunge through ten feet of dark and oily seaweed fronds in the North Sea in January would have wakened me up pretty sharpish!

However, not to be outdone I settled on a less testy miracle, one that wouldn't involve disaster should it for any reason - and of course God forbid - not work. I decided instead to believe that I was invisible.

And so it was, with me invisible, that Huw and I crossed the road and bounded up the stairs into the pub. The proprietor of the establishment obviously thought my behaviour was rather odd, but I don't think he realised he was dealing with the invisible man - it must have been my clothes that gave me away!

Anyway, moving on...

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<sup>1</sup> Except He didn't wait till it was flat! [Matthew 14:22-33]

For three days and nights I embarked on a cannabis-enhanced rampage of spiritual experimentation and discovery where the only rule was ‘anything goes’. If I believed it, then I lived it, and if it failed (and I survived) I discarded it. Strangely, not everything failed... but we’ll come to that.

These events were twenty six years ago now, and I do not remember everything that happened, and I certainly kept no diary. But the fact is that for many weeks afterward I had absolutely no recollection whatsoever. It was a three day blank<sup>1</sup>. I’m not under any illusion about it now - I know I was experiencing a nervous breakdown - nothing unique or unusual in that, but what a thin line it is that divides sanity from madness. Truly flimsy and dangerously worn is the rope that tethers our ornately decorated hot-air balloon of rational thought to its tiny post, driven into the shifting sands of this uncertain world.

Though I did not know it, I was hacking away at the line.

I ended up at Huw’s place that night. We continued to get high, relaxing into the small hours and listening as ever to music. What is it about music? We reached the staring-into-space stage. The time was past for communication. This was the bit I liked - just me and my thoughts. Just Huw and his thoughts as well - and there is definitely a

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from instantaneous flashbacks from time to time.



shared fellowship in that - an awe, a joy, almost what I would now describe as a spiritual experience of worship. The only thing missing was God. But I never noticed that. How can you miss what you've never had? You just fill the gap.

You know about the gap, so you fill it.

The music played on and I became very deeply relaxed - so relaxed in fact that in the midst of the guitar solo in a very bluesy *Stephen Stills* song something deep inside my belly clicked into perfect sync with the music. I felt it like a physical connection, like jumping on to a moving vehicle. Instantly the song began to slow down and dramatically slurred its speed, moving and slowing with me like a sound effect to a Salvador Dali painting as I relaxed until - upon my realisation of what was happening - I tightened up with excitement and the music took off like a tape being eaten by the machine! At this point my sudden conscious awareness of the effect my total oneness with the music was having broke the bond and I 'clicked out.' The music returned to normal.

I immediately turned to Huw and asked him, "Did you hear that?" He confirmed that it had actually happened in the room, not just in my head!!!

No matter how hard I tried I could not regain that sublimely peaceful and pleasant state.

Analysis:

Now, the thing about this particular experience is that it raises considerably more questions than it answers. Of course if you simply write it off as the crazed ramblings of an ex-hippy it raises no questions at all. But for those who may be willing to accept that it did happen as described I would like to say this: how is it possible for things physical (the record player, the stylus, the vinyl record, the sound waves) to be affected and overruled by things not physical (the relaxed state, the drug (in this case marijuana), the music)? I still don't know. Who does? Science reaches its limitations here and the scientist is forced to fall back either on the universal escape clause that the experiment is unrepeatable, or his/her normal human prejudice against the possibility of such occurrences<sup>1</sup>, or a combination of the two.

As I lay awake and alone in someone's bed that night I had what I can only describe as a vision. I clearly saw myself sitting in the backshop at Elgin, straining under a heavy load of pressure and worry. The view I had was from above and in front, like from a security camera. But what struck me was that this load of care was being foisted upon me as a deception from without, by some powerful invisible force. It was as though the pressure was in some way not real unless I believed

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<sup>1</sup> Faith, by any other name.

it and accepted it as a reality, which of course I did. There seemed to me to be a definite purpose to that vision, as though someone was trying to communicate something very important to me, something very much to my benefit.

Could it be that two exceptionally powerful and living spiritual forces - one good and one evil, one for me and one against me - were engaged in some sort of celestial competition over me? And that this battle was almost imperceptible to me, woven neatly into the fabric of my life from birth in such a way that I took it all for granted - *and missed it!* Jesus had said “Seek and ye shall find,” but it would be years before I would find out that the actual meaning of the words Jesus used were “Seek and *persevere in your seeking*, and you shall find.”

Why do we miss the obvious in the familiar.

This was my first real glimpse of the ‘Battle of the Ages.’ But its full significance was still lost on me as I continued to fumble and grope my way through the night-mist that was my life.

The effect all this had on me was to feed my belief that life was not really as we know it. That somehow we were all settling for a kind of troubled banality that fell awe-inspiringly short of the real intention for life. Bubbling away in the background was an increasing awareness of the hand of design - a silent feeling that Someone was watching, and that somehow, somewhere, there was a *plan*.

I somehow ended up in Aberdeen with Huw the next day, visiting another like-minded acquaintance, hitting the night-spots, and then journeying back in the early hours of Sunday. I remember next to nothing of that day except being completely wired to the moon. Out to lunch with Einstein, Descartes and the Buddha. As my son who is now nine was recently heard to say, “Every day is *somebody’s* birthday!” and I was sure celebrating...

On Sunday afternoon I found myself with quite a few others at the home in Banff of a friend who was a separated mother-of-two.

By this time I had had enough. I made a momentous decision... to stop making it all up. I felt tired and as I laid my head down in the comfortable armchair I drifted into a calm acceptance and determination to leave everything behind. Yes I felt sad, I even felt a kind of background hum of panic, but the time had come and my troubles tipped my scales.

One after another the people I knew and loved began to leave. But to me it was not they who were leaving - it was me. One by one they went away, and I accepted that they were simply bowing out of my life and disappearing over my event horizon and I would never see them again, but I knew that even my sadness was an illusion, and soon the grand illusion of my existence would be over.

Time ceased to have meaning, and peaceful blackness became my world.

Then the TV got switched on - one of the kids I think. Rather uncomfortable as the speaker was beside my ear! Next I became aware of the delicious smell of frying bacon as it permeated the house. To say that I found all this disconcerting would be an understatement. Very quickly I realised the full implications - *reality must be real!*

Well, at least I now knew what *wasn't* true.

There's no doubt that in retrospect this all seems quite amusing, but to me at the time it was deadly serious, and it was no mean feat really when you think about it. I had after all completely demolished the ultimate goal of at least one of the world's major belief systems, to my own satisfaction at least!

However, if everything was *real*, I now had to find an understanding of ultimate truth which took account of that fact and found its place within it. Spiritual escapism was no longer an option.

I became depressed. Why? Because I was back where I started. Square one.

Well, perhaps not quite...

I somehow ended up that night back at Fochabers. I think Joe and me just headed on up and Gordon was already there (minus Pan, fortunately). A fairly normal relaxing evening ensued... oh yeah... apart from the reggae thing. The music 'clicking in' thing happened again for the second and final time, during - of all things - a reggae song. Both lads confirmed they heard it, although neither of them knew about the first time! Again it was completely spontaneous and unexpected, but how can anyone possibly get to the bottom of such a totally subjective experience?

I remember I had my chair (funny what we remember). And at least I didn't have to get up for work on Monday!

Although I had had little or no contact with Phil over the weekend, and in spite of my rude metaphysical awakening at the hands of the TV and the bacon, I continued to believe wholeheartedly that there was something of great significance going on - that in some way my select group was deeply involved in some great celestial event - a kind of breaking through of one world into another, with all the wonder, force and mess of a birth. Pain, I reasoned, was inevitable.

Whereas before the most important thing had been to know, to figure everything out, now I had become fully convinced of the reality of the spiritual world, and the fact that I hadn't the slightest clue what was actually going on meshed easily into the scheme of things, in a way reinforcing the sense of awe and spiritual power that I sensed. I now

felt assured that spiritual things were the most important, and in a way felt sorry for the great majority who seemed to be living materially-based lives, driven, motivated and deceived by the reverse-priority systems of the world.

In retrospect I believe the others of my circle weren't quite where I thought they were at. Some were - Huw and Phil for sure - but everyone was experiencing things according to their own perception and frame of mind. It very much depended how desperate you were, how dissatisfied with your life and the current status quo.

The thing that really strikes me about that time was that *no-one* had any answers. Even Phil, who a few days before had seemed such an awesome guru, appeared now just to be guessing (which of course he had been doing before - I just hadn't seen it.) I could search and search till I was blue in the face but no-one around was able to shed even the tiniest shaft of light on my plight.

Yet still the Battle raged...

It was now Monday evening. A kind of aimlessness had begun to descend. I can't remember anything of that day except that I ended up at the Fife Arms in Banff, drinking 'black and tan' and playing pool. About eight o'clock the door opened and my old man walked in. He marched insalubriously over and said something abrupt like, "Come

with me!” As we left I was bundled into his car at the door and abducted in the name of sanity.

I was driven for some reason to Huw’s parents’ house where an angry lynch mob awaited me consisting of both sets of parents. Of course my folks had been beside themselves with worry for three days and three nights until, as in the familiar story of the prophet Jonah I was ‘spewed up out of the belly of the fish’ before them.

Huw was there as well. As always he was cool as a cucumber, playing everything down as far as was humanly possible under the circumstances and missing no opportunity to suggest that everyone was over-reacting. Of course they weren’t. They were just *reacting*, as any concerned parents would.

The questions came thick and fast... it was an interrogation really, and a most uncomfortable one for me to say the least - far more so for me than for Huw, reason being he had *always* been a bad boy. He was the black sheep of the family, the ‘disappointment’, the man with the mind that launched a thousand encyclopaedias (he used to get all the questions right on *Mastermind*) but the lifestyle of a drop-out. No doubt there are a whole psychologist’s casebook of reasons for that, but that’s just who Huw was. As for me, I was, and had always been, goody two-shoes.

I showed very little emotion, declaring that the hate thing I had displayed toward my mother on the Friday night had been a ‘mistake.’



To start with I think I did attempt to convey to them something of what had actually gone on, and the reasons for it, although my garbled exposition tended to focus more on philosophical and religious issues raised over the weekend rather than the bigger picture of why I had broken down in the first place, which they might perhaps have found more relevant. However, it has to be remembered that at this point I had no idea that I had broken down. I believed with all my heart that everything that had happened (apart from the hate thing) had been a step in the right direction.

Huw, as I recall, was also desperately engaged in gloriously futile *new age* apologetics. He tirelessly tried to get them to see our point of view. He was basically backing me up. The problem with that was that all our parents were interested in was the subject of *drugs*. Understandable.

I think we came clean about the dope<sup>1</sup>. I can't remember there being much else to be honest - not that weekend at any rate. But they went on and on about needles and injections and heroin. It seemed they found it impossible to believe that anyone could behave like this without some serious stuff being involved. It didn't matter how much we protested, no-one was buying it. They asked to see my arm. I

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<sup>1</sup> Cannabis.

willingly obliged, thinking it would settle the issue. But then - to my absolute horror - a tiny round, red scar stood out on my vein.

I was found guilty.

It was actually a blood test - but I wasn't about to tell them what that was for!

At this point I decided that the best way to play it - to minimise the overall hassle of the situation - was to feign repentance. I went through the motions of appearing contrite, accepting again back into my life all the worldly wisdom I had so foolishly in a moment of dazed confusion turned my back on. Huw was taken aback. He tried to strengthen our case, but I remember turning to him and saying, "No Huw, just let it go." He did, eventually, and the tone of the discussion visibly calmed as we appeared to see reason.

Not much more was said about the whole affair.

I went back to my folks' place and was given a bedroom. I was basically under house arrest, for my own good obviously. I was completely forbidden to see my cronies, and although I wasn't at all keen on this arrangement, I lacked the strength to resist. I knew that much of my behaviour had been foolishness - especially toward my folks - so, in the complete absence of any better ideas, I resigned myself to a period of rest, just to take stock.

But there was one major problem with this set-up... I had run out of dope.

Denied access to my partners-in-grime I had no way of getting stoned. Of course, as any dope-head will tell you, cannabis is non-addictive. Well, I suppose that's true in a physical sense in that no external ill effects can befall, but, as I was to discover, psychological effects are another thing entirely. Of course the dope-head will normally deny this also, but there is such a thing as being too close to a thing to see it for oneself.

My head was still very full of stuff. I still felt at one with my brothers 'on the outside' and I now played the martyr for the cause. If truth be told, I don't think anyone else noticed I was gone. As I said before, not everyone was as strung out as I was. Phil was. Sadly Phil was very strung out indeed - very possibly at the point of no return - but he didn't need me. He never did. Phil was always a self-contained unit.

The first full day in captivity was spent feigning normality. My folks seemed content that I was accepting their prescription and for my part the arrangement worked because I got no hassle.

As I write this, I am finding myself appalled at how utterly self-centred I was. I think I had so many skeletons in my closet there was

no room for anyone else. To me ‘niceness’ was definitely still a virtue... like a Big Mac is still food.

Truth, however, still eluded me.

As the first day turned into the second, two things started to happen...

Firstly, I was finding it harder and harder to see things in the same light<sup>1</sup> as before. I seemed more and more to be struggling to hold the vision in my mind of the ‘brave new world’ which we were pioneering. A disturbingly unstrange kind of mental ordinariness seemed to be clouding me over, and by the middle of the week the lack of marijuana rendered me well and truly back in the land inhabited by everyone else.

Realising this, I then had to make the big decision as to whether the drug had been the catalyst *revealing* the insight and perception, or actually *causing* it.

Not an easy one.

I decided on the former, though I had some uncomfortable doubts.

Secondly - and far more worryingly - the whole weekend turned into a blank in my mind.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the word advisedly (whatever that means. I’ve always wondered, but it sounds good.)

My memory circuits just went on overload and decided to shut down the entire *bonspal*<sup>1</sup>. This was not good. It wasn't simply a case of a load of nonsense becoming harder for me to continue to believe, although there was that. It was as though my mind was shifting into automatic pilot, and there was *absolutely nothing I could do to stop it*.

The human mind is a great servant, but if you ill-treat the servants, they can turn. It felt to me as though there was a 'shutting down' process in motion. I had instructed and drilled my own mind to disbelieve the world, and now that I was beginning to need the world again, it refused.

My sanity - and by that I mean my ability to perceive myself as having a logical and rational, mutually interactive place in the world - began to take wings. It felt like the balloon I alluded to earlier and I could feel it beginning to...float...away...

But it was something very ordinary that came to my rescue - and even compared to everything else this bit sounds stupid, even to me: the coal bill, the milk bill, the car which had to be sold to pay them, and of course the old *thru' penny bit house* in Fochabers which would also have to be sold. In short, my responsibilities. These formed the last

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<sup>1</sup> *Bonspal*: a wonderful Shetland word I picked up from Lillian, my wife. It apparently means a great hoo-hah transpiring amongst a group of people getting over-excited about something. I doubt there's a more appropriate word in the Oxford Dictionary.

few remaining strands of the rope which tethered my mental balloon - which was literally how I saw it at the time - to the ground.

I started to feel washed out and extremely weak. The resolve and brazen defiance which had characterised my breakdown had by now deserted me.

I feel the need at this point to apologise to you, dear reader, for the constant and repetitious use of the words *I, me, my* etc. Everyone loves to talk about themselves and I'm no exception, but from this point on my story *involves nobody else*. What I experienced over the months to come happened entirely within my own head and heart, and as it unfolded I told no-one. There seemed no point. Consequently I felt isolated, and the gulf between what was going on inside and what others saw began to widen.

I don't know how I came to have it - considering most of my things still lay up in the now deserted<sup>1</sup> house - but I had with me in my little bedroom/sanctuary in Macduff the old neglected King James Bible from the Elgin roup.

Now, if there's one word I could use to sum up that Bible it would be this one: *scary*.

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<sup>1</sup> The poor lodgers had received short shrift from my folks!

To start with it was black, with floppy, sagging, leathery-cardboard covers and nail-scratched, gold leaf edging to the thin and delicate-yet-strong pages. It was also big. Not as big as an old Family Bible but large enough to be a fairly hefty tome. The writing was small, and laid out as with all old Bibles: in a double column on each page, divided up into chapters and individually printed and numbered verses. And then of course there was the *style* of it - antiquated, difficult, Shakespearean, back to front, and full of ...*eth's*, *lo's* and *whithersoever thou goest's*!

And all this before we even start on the *subject matter*...

The subject matter.

Well, to me the inspired and ancient authors of the Word of God needn't have bothered with the great big thick bit in the middle. As far as I was concerned the Bible consisted only of the first few chapters in Genesis, describing the origins of creation, and the Book of Revelation at the back, describing the end of the world.

Having said that, I was aware that a fair amount of the rest of the Book spoke about Jesus, but I had no idea what it actually said. I had my own ideas about Him and - like the vast majority of people in our society who see absolutely no need to look into it any further - I was arrogantly content with what I knew.

So what *did* I think I knew? I knew that he had been a good man who died for his principles at the hands of the same two-faced empty world I hated, rather than shut up or accept compromise.

So, for as little as I knew about Jesus Christ, I certainly knew that I respected him. I even went so far in my present plight as to *identify* with Him, though my principles were hardly on a par with his! But since I didn't actually know what his principles were<sup>1</sup> it didn't really matter. At this point I had no inkling of any need to concern myself with Jesus Christ, so my feelings were irrelevant. I was only interested in Genesis and Revelation.

The book of Genesis made very little sense to me, other than the general impression of the awesomeness of God in creation, and the general sort of scientificness of the process. Adam and Eve I understood to symbolise mankind in general and I didn't like the snake much. The impression it all conveyed to me was of the human race as a vast spiritual war zone, locked in an ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil.

So far so good.

As I read the Book of Revelation on the other hand, things began to get far more specific. At this point I began to personalise it, narrowing down the events described in an attempt to shed light on my

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<sup>1</sup> Or mine.



own situation. Unfortunately the apocalyptic nature of the vision described in the book by the apostle John doesn't lend itself to an overly personalised interpretation. In fact, many have got themselves into deep water trying to interpret it at all, let alone apply it to themselves! I read of the 'Beast'<sup>1</sup> and somehow identified with him. Not good.

That night I had a frighteningly real dream which scared me:

I dreamt I was driving my car out past the golf course in Macduff. The car was full of people and I was doing about 140mph<sup>2</sup>. I began to lose control and we careered wildly about the road, glancing off an oncoming truck and spinning and smashing violently through fences...

It was so real. I stared my own death in the face. Waking up in a sweat I couldn't shake myself free of the impression of it and it stayed with me the whole of the next day.

Going up to my room early that night because there was little else to do and I couldn't stand to watch TV, I remember very clearly sitting up in bed and attempting to read the old Bible. But then something happened in the room...

I can only describe it as like a swirling wind that entered through the yellow curtains by the right side of my (closed) upstairs bay window. As it swept around the room and seemed to swirl around my

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<sup>1</sup> As in the 'mark of the Beast'.

<sup>2</sup> In a *Marina*?!

head, I had the experience of seeing my whole life up to that point ‘flash before my eyes’. The power and presence of the wind seemed to illuminate the experience in such a way that the impression I received from my past was contrasted against a backdrop of *absolute perfection*. I saw my thoughts, words and deeds. But it was not my words or even my deeds that struck me, but my thoughts. They appeared *black*, and very, very bad. My whole short lifetime’s thought-life, compressed into a moment and stained black as sin.

Imagine telling your best friend your deepest and most intimate secret - the one you’ve never told *anyone* - only to discover that you had been sitting next to a live microphone on national radio. It was like that - an experience of being laid bare, exposed, completely outed!

I knew that it was God.

How can I possibly say that, after all the rubbish that was passing through my head?

Well, the fact is that there is nothing in the experience of our lives to which God can be compared. He is outside of normal experience. Why? Because he created it. He created normal experience - you, me and everything in it.<sup>1</sup>

So how did I know? I knew.

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<sup>1</sup> So who created Him, do I hear you ask? Listen, when God moves in your life its not him who’s in the dock.

You'll know too.

Now, the Bible says that God is love. It also states that he is kind, merciful and slow to anger. Unfortunately I hadn't read those bits. To me God was the righteous and awesome Judge - Lord of all, perfect, holy, almighty, and definitely not into little upstarts who go around thinking they are one half of Jesus, ushering in the New Age of Man! I was freaked out. Scared. I felt lost, and even more isolated and lonely than before.

Still I told no-one. There was no point.

Whether it was the same night or the next I can't quite recall, but I as I sat there in bed reading the Book of Revelation, I happened to read chapter 20, verse 10:

*'And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever..'*

This stunned me. I was completely appalled.

I *was* the beast.

For some reason I had in my previous and unenlightened reading of that book lined up the beast and the false prophet as myself

and Phil, respectively. And now I knew our end... my end. I was utterly stripped of hope.

Have you ever been stripped of hope? I imagine its the point at which people commit suicide. Hope is one of those ethereal qualities that we all possess in varying quantities at different times, and *need* to survive. It drives us, and sometimes the less of it we have, the more it motivates us, but we all need ‘something to look forward to’ like we need air, or food.

At this point, my doom was sealed. Fated now to wander the earth till I died, then be cast alive into the lake of fire, there to be tormented day and night for ever and ever. It gives me the shivers just to write this - to remember it. I have to say that there is a very large part of me that refuses to commit emotionally to reliving it. I view it from a distance, kind of as a spectator. I apologise for this, as I do feel it is important for me to experience rather than simply relate these things, but this is a line I cannot cross.

For the next few days I wandered the earth. Events seemed unreal to me. People seemed happy, and carefree, though obviously completely wrapped up in trivia that they imagined to be important. I was distant, or at least I think I must have seemed distant. I could hardly bring myself to make the mental effort to answer their questions, but I suppose I did.

But I now had a decision to make.

That big black Bible frightened me. It was when I saw it - open or not - that I stared literally into the Abyss. I wanted desperately to put it away. I would have been afraid to destroy it, and I don't actually recall considering that, but I so wanted to shove it in the bottom of my wardrobe and forget about it - just to put it out of my life. But something held me back: it was the realisation (and I believe this was a true realisation) that if I did, I would indeed be sealing my fate. Since I had no hope, you may ask what difference that would make, but I knew, somehow, that the *only* chance I had was in facing up squarely to that book.

I tried to say the Lord's Prayer, but I had forgotten it.

Each night before I slept I would attempt to recall a little more of it:

*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name...* and each night, sure enough, a little more would come back to me. For some reason I still believe it was important that I remember it, rather than go and find out from somewhere - and of course there was no way I could *ask* anyone (not even Google!)

It had to come from me.

I was trying to recall it from school. In my primary school days - and also at earlier secondary assemblies - we were vainly subjected to

it regularly, along with nineteenth century children's hymns such as *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *You in Your Small Corner* and *Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam*. Of course, it was all in one ear and out the other, as I suspect it was for most of us, little heathens that we were! The whole shebang seemed like a totally incomprehensible load of grown-up, far-fetched, waste-of-time gobbledygook. And the fact they removed it from our scene half way through secondary was just a case of good riddance - more fuel to my view that believing in God was for our scientifically ignorant and superstitious forebears, with no place in the modern world.

But not now.

Now I needed to cling to it as a *possible* lifeline. I had nothing else, because I now knew that *God is real*.

Although I prayed the Lord's Prayer every night - and I was chuffed that it had finally all come back to me - the thought still never occurred to me that I could in any way approach God. He remained distant and fearful and my approach was more along the lines of appeasement.

As I ploughed my way through the fulfilment of my remaining obligations (the ones that had kept me sane) I hit against a problem. I had been advertising my car for sale in the local paper without success for a couple of weeks and the cost of the adverts had now mounted up

to the extortionate sum of £70<sup>1</sup>. The thing was only worth £300 - but this now meant I *had* to sell it to pay for the adverts!

I felt under pressure.

Pressure - for me, at that time. Not a good thing.

I talked to people about the car. I had been asking around trying to sell it, and was approached in the Seafield bar by a chap who said he knew of a buyer. The buyer lived in Buckie (about twenty miles up the coast). The guy looked a bit rough, a bit shabby, but I had always naively looked for the best in people so I did as he suggested. I turned up the next day, Saturday lunch-time, with the car and as requested all the books (i.e. the Registration Certificate).

It would be better if he went alone, I was informed, as he knew the buyer well and would be more likely to get a sale if I wasn't there. I can't say I felt comfortable about this but I needed the sale so we agreed to meet back at the pub at teatime.

Of course I told my folks nothing of this as I knew they would never agree, but I was desperate so I just didn't tell them. What do parents know anyway?

When I arrived back at the pub at the appointed hour, surprise surprise there was no-one there. I made enquiries but was told that the

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<sup>1</sup> The P&J in 1979. Unbelievable yet true. It was before the days of free personal ads.

chap had been seen heading off with another two guys... well-known local petty criminals. I felt something unpleasant turn over in the pit of my stomach.

Eventually about eight o'clock, the guy turned up. I found him hunched over the bar, totally and absolutely inebriated - celebrating actually - and fortuitously incapable of communication. As it turned out they did get £300 for my old Marina, from a dodgy dealer in Buckie - but I never saw a penny of it.

Now I had two problems, the greater of which was... how am I going to tell my folks?